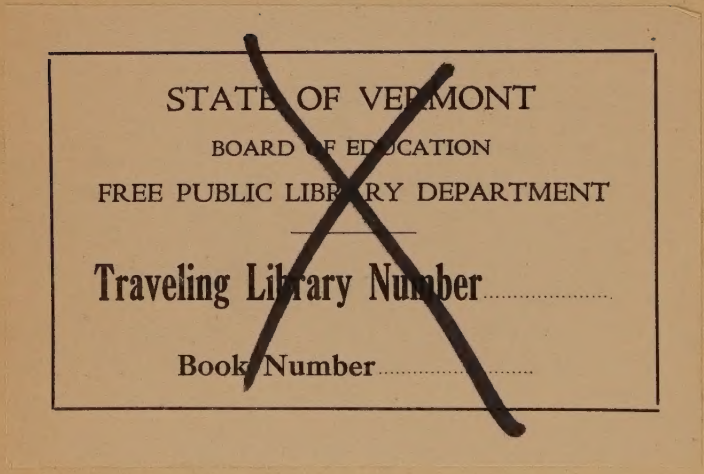
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MAN POSSESSED

BY WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

Poetry:

MAN POSSESSED: *Selected Poems*
MOONS OF GRANDEUR
PERPETUAL LIGHT
THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC
THE GREAT WHITE WALL
THE FALCONER OF GOD
MERCHANTS FROM CATHAY

For Children:

THE FLYING KING OF KURIO

A Novel:

THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

Essays:

WILD GOSLINGS

Man Possessed

Being
The Selected Poems
of
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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MAN POSSESSED
—B—
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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To
ELINOR WYLIE

8917

The author desires to convey particular thanks to the Yale University Press for their very generous permission to include here poems selected from the following volumes published by them:

MERCHANTS FROM CATHAY, 1913
THE FALCONER OF GOD, 1914
THE GREAT WHITE WALL, 1916
THE BURGLAR OF THE ZODIAC, 1918
PERPETUAL LIGHT, 1919

FOREWORD

These poems are selected from the following six books: "Merchants from Cathay" (1913), "The Falconer of God" (1914), "The Great White Wall" (1916), "The Burglar of the Zodiac" (1918), "Perpetual Light" (1919), and "Moons of Grandeur" (1920). With the exception of the last named, all the above volumes now bear the imprint of the Yale University Press, to whom my thanks are due for allowing me to include selections from them. Certain new poems have been introduced here, never before published in a volume of mine.

I have preferred what seemed a reasonable categorical grouping rather than a chronological arrangement. Earlier poems have been revised wherever it seemed necessary. One book of mine, "Perpetual Light," is a memorial to my first wife. I have selected nine poems from it, but it should properly be read as a whole, as a tribute to an individual.

The third section of this book is no less a tribute to an individual, to a poet and prose writer of genius, whose husband I have the honor to be.

I shall say nothing theoretical concerning these poems. Theory is poetry's chief enemy. These are of their kind. I have striven to select what I conceive to be the best.

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT.

New York City, September, 1927.

PREFACE

THE THING CALLED POETRY

WHEN any of us approach a definition of the thing called poetry we necessarily stammer, we begin to say, "Well, it is like this" or "Well, it is like that," "Well, it —there is a lot of it in the Bible," " Well, it doesn't matter whether it is written in free verse or whether it is rhymed," "Well, Keats was poetry," or "Well, Shelley was poetry."

Carl Sandburg a few years ago gave us a new set of highly imaginative definitions of what poetry was. George Moore recently published an anthology in which he claimed to have found out exactly what poetry was. He called his anthology "Pure Poetry." To-day every poet worth his salt—as it was with our elders, and with the ancients before those elders—has a perfectly clear, *instinctive* idea of the particular kind of poetry he wants to try to write. He or she has specific ideas about form, about technique. But more than this each particular poet is stirred by certain particular things, not by other things. There are certain sights, sounds, ideas, words, circumstances that particularly quicken the pulse and particularly excite the mind. And in respect to these beneficent irritants to the intelligence and to the senses, no two poets are quite alike.

It is necessary to look beneath the mode and manners of the period, beneath the faddishness of any period, beneath the convention in art of any period, to come upon the thing called

poetry. And it is obvious that we find then a quicksilver element that is essential to every art. We find the essential "dæmon, beauty to adore and dream on." For, as one modern poet has stated it,

> Our joys are not of heaven or earth, but man's,
> A woman's beauty, or a child's delight,
> The trembling blood when the discoverer scans
> The sought-for world, the guessed-at satellite;
> The ringing scene, the stone at point to blush
> For unborn men to look at and say "Hush."

That which we find is a quickening of our potentiality for enjoyment. Most people seek for enjoyment entirely in the five senses. What we seek for in art is an enjoyment that includes and, at the same time, transcends the enjoyment felt in the full exercise of our senses. We seek an ineffable thing. My own belief is that when that ineffable element is added to our enjoyment, the picture, the music, the combination of printed words through, and by means of which, it is added, can be called great. Great in some sense. Great in that sense—that we do more then than, as a poet has put it, kneel at the altar of the Naked Fact. For then the nakedness of fact is clothed in something ineffable. Who shall say why, or by what sorcery.

Our senses alone may seem to give us this. In young love, in first romance, for instance, the world changes, the dull prospect is irradiated with light. But that too is poetry. For poetry, in any art, is merely the translation of those phases of experience, of those moments of mental or physical exhilaration, when a spirit distinctly seems to move through matter.

To the potential poet—that is, to any one sensitive to ex-

perience—to any one with the curse in his or her blood that intensifies experience and makes moments beautiful or terrible beyond the comprehension of the cool outside observer—to any of these (and there are many and many) there are a thousand pictures behind the retina that will never be painted, there are a thousand plastic shapes of beauty that haunt dream and waking, there is music that will never be scored and many poems every day that will never be written. For the wind of the spirit (or whatever you may call it, if not spirit) bloweth where it listeth, the apocalyptic thing lurks constantly in the commonplace.

At which point you are going to hiss the word "mystic." But any one who deals at all with the thing called poetry is necessarily and inexorably a mystic in that sense. The present-day poets who would most abjure and deny the word "mystic" are mystics in that sense. Critics with scalpel intellect are mystics in that sense when confronted by the art that moves them.

The art that moves us! That is the point of contention about all art, and will always be. It is the point in all the contention concerning poetry in the present day. One man's art does not move another man. New minds, new emotional constitutions constantly come forward to have their say about the art of the past and to try reshape the art of the present. And let us thank God that we are still as much alive to art as all that, as much quickened by the thing called poetry, that we will wrangle and revolt and assert our theories about it, and raise it from the dead if we believe it to be dead—that we believe in the resurrection and the life of poetry.

Perhaps the dæmon that is poetry most keenly exists, for

the average person, in moods never expressed in any of the arts, in moments of keen experience remembered in each individual life. It may exist keenly for years in the memory of a certain running through the night, in the memory of an Autumn moon,—of any one of the fundamental experiences common to every one, and in certain circumstances surrounding any one of those experiences—in the memory of love and birth and death, certain particular memories—of certain words, of a certain look, of the small incident, of the apparently trifling thing.

This is poetry, that Stephen Crane remembered, in "The Price of the Harness":

"It ain't very damp, Jimmie," said Grierson.

"Well, it is damp," said Nolan, with sudden irritability. "I can feel it. I'm wet, I tell you—wet through—just from lying here."

They answered hastily. "Yes, that's so, Jimmie. It *is* damp. That's so."

"Just put your hand under my back and see how wet the ground is," he said.

"No," they answered. "That's all right, Jimmie. We know it's wet."

"Well, put your hand under and see," he cried stubbornly.

"Oh, never mind, Jimmie."

"No," he said, in a temper. "See for yourself."

Grierson seemed to be afraid of Nolan's agitation, and so he slipped a hand under the prostrate man, and presently withdrew it covered with blood. "Yes," he said, hiding his hand carefully from Nolan's eyes, "you were right, Jimmie."

"Of course I was," said Nolan, contentedly closing his eyes. "This hillside holds water like a swamp." After a moment he said, "Guess I ought to know. I'm flat here on it, and you fellers are standing up."

He did not know he was dying. He thought he was holding an argument on the condition of the turf.

But that, you will say, is simply the reporting by an artist of an affecting incident. And, you may possibly say, that does not affect *me* so much, after all. Plenty of men die constantly, in even more moving ways. But to me, the writer of this, the point about that passage from Crane is that it happens to move me very much indeed. It rises, if only by reticence, to the pitch where I call it poetry. Poetry is then, to me, a matter of pitch and intensity. Yes, it most assuredly is. Of intensity.

I have been talking of The Thing called Poetry. For I want to make perfectly clear that I have come to the belief that the thing called poetry has nothing whatever to do with the construction of what we call verse as opposed to prose. Perhaps I have labored an obvious matter. But I find many intelligent people still under what I consider the delusion that poetry is this or is that manner of writing. That you say Tennyson, for an instance, and you say Poetry. That to-day you say E. E. Cummings, for another instance, and that then you say Poetry—and, one is led to infer, that poetry has seldom been written prior to the work of this and a few other modern exemplars.

It is possible, of course, to turn to the late Lord Tennyson, put your finger on a passage and say this is poetry—and then to turn to the work of Mr. Cummings, single out other passages and say, this too is poetry. The particular passages you submit (whether from Lord Alfred or Wordsworth or Shelley or Browning or Swinburne or Mr. De la Mare or Mr. Masefield or Mr. T. S. Eliot or Mr. Cummings or any one you choose)—the particular passages you submit, hopefully, to any other poet for agreement, will probably be rejected by the other poet—who will then explain to you carefully and perhaps unkindly just what poetry really is. But if you have

chosen them according to pitch and intensity as these operate upon your particular type of mind and your own particular emotional constitution, they remain poetry. They constrict the dæmon—at least, for you.

I find barren all this coil about technique; I read and criticize poetry within my own limitations, according to my own intellectual predilections, according to my own emotional nature. Where there are perfectly definite matters to be decided, as to whether, for instance, a *ballade* written conforms to a prescribed and fixed pattern, and is technically a true *ballade*—as to whether a sonnet is Shakespearian or Petrarchan, as to whether I prefer a ballad measure for certain material to blank verse—in these and many like matters I have a definite opinion. In the matter of preference I have definite preferences. They are my own. They are as definite as my idea of whom I would call a beautiful woman or of whom I would call a pretty woman. I know that they are merely my opinions, important to me. Unfortunately, one has to have opinions. But when you speak of poetry, I find it here, there, and everywhere. I find it in many places where I know others cannot possibly be expected to perceive it. And others, doubtless, find it in places where I could not recognize it with the strongest visual aids in the world.

Ask me if I like the work of So-and-So better than the work of So-and-So and I can tell you either at once or after a brief meditation. Ask me *what* I like in the work of Such Another and I can tell you offhand. But ask me if I don't think Tennyson wrote rubbish, or if I don't think that the elimination of capitals at the beginning of lines of poetry is a great step forward in the poetic art, and I will leave you with huddled unintelligible phrase. You are involved in catchwords and modes and manners. You are pecking at the

surface of what you call art. You never deeply thought or clearly willed. For you all the mortal power of Coleridge was withered at its marvelous source, yet you would dismiss

> The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
> At one stride comes the dark

as "Oh, that old narrative thing!"; for you was written, "somewhere a silver fountain steals the world," but you are chiefly excited because Mr. Cummings has dispensed with capital letters and prints his verse in fantastic patterns. Why, *of* you, perhaps, was written by Cicero, *Stultorum plena sunt omnia.*

It is interesting to discuss the structure of a Greek play, to speak of prologue, parodos, episode, and stasimon,—to consider the elements of construction, the characteristics of form. But is that to know, in mind and heart, the frenzy of Æschylus? If one is writing poetry or reading, *truly* reading poetry, it is with more than "interest." Like the son of Apollo and Evadne, the poet has been fed upon golden provand by brindled serpents. Who writes poetry, strangely, insidiously imbibes honey from the poisoned lips of life. Here is marvel! Or who reads may listen as the lost in hell listened to that linnet singing from the blackened bough, until

> At last they knew that they had died
> When they heard music in that land,
> And someone there stole forth a hand
> To draw a brother to his side.

A fashionable interest in poetry? Tush! An academic interest in poetry? Zounds! Insofar as some intimation of the indwelling dæmon of poetry has been vouchsafed you,

scorn not then even what might, without such benefit of dæmonology, appear to you the "stilted language" of old Michael Drayton's twentieth song from Polyolbion,—for rather than collate and distinguish and inveigh and disparage in the musty study, a-hawking we will go:

The trembling fowl that hear the jigging hawk-bells ring,
And find it is too late to trust them to their wing,
Lie flat upon the flood, whilst the high-mounted hawks,
Then being lords alone in their ethereal walks,
Aloft so bravely stir their bells so thick that shake,
Which when the falconer sees, that scarce one plane they make,
"The gallant'st birds," saith he, "that ever flew on wing,"
And swears there is a flight, were worthy of a king.

If that flight you deem not worthy of a king, do not at least waste your time in research upon it. If "the high-mounted hawks then being lords alone in their ethereal walks" do not impress your mind indelibly or quicken your blood, remember, at least, that, as Sidney knew, "Invention, Nature's child," flees "step-dame Study's blows," and that the "study" of poetry is, in good sooth, but the step-dame of poetry.

Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,
"Fool!" said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write!"

I have not been arguing. I have been rhapsodizing on the thing called poetry, attempting, with here an example and there an example and playing no favorites, to trace the spirit of poetry moving through various matter. And if my discourse has landed me at last at the end of the sixteenth century with a somewhat stereotyped quotation, so be it. What of it? These men were moved if they can move us still. Intense emotion raised their natures to the pitch to write.

Every poet can appreciate what Sidney spoke of as "biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite." I will even dare to say that the intensity with which one writes what has been called "serious verse" is keyed higher than the intensity with which one writes even the finest prose. And if the intensity of the nature that produces the serious verse is great enough, the production is great poetry. Others fail in degree.

But a great many people could sit down, in the past, and make things rhyme and a great many people can sit down to-day and painstakingly see that nothing rhymes. And a great deal of this stuff was and is called poetry. And all this, of course, has very little to do with poetry.

As for the past. Our natures may be akin to the natures of certain poets who wrote greatly in the past, not akin to the natures of others who wrote certainly as intensely. There our predilections enter. There our prejudices. Yet we can, perhaps, still appreciate the great variety of matter and manner through which and by means of which the thing that is poetry has flickered like quicksilver all down the ages.

That, surely, is the important thing! It is important that so many of mankind, and in such various ways, have been seized and used by something that has so enlarged their capacity for enjoyment, using and yet transcending the capacity for enjoyment resident in the five senses. It is important that man is an artist. It is important that he is quickened to express infinitely elusive moments, moods, "blank misgivings of a Creature moving about in worlds not realized." Modes and manners, fads and fashions as to the clothing of his thought, of his instinct, of his piercing sight and second-sight, of what we call his "inspiration,"—these change, these are of interest, these beget critics. But it is

more to us that still we track the phœnix flown, that still we wait for the spark from Heaven to fall.

In the practice of poetry as in the practice of every art, there is the thorough learning of the craft, there is a necessary knowledge of technique, there is a great deal to be assimilated before the poet can realize all the resources of his art. But all this is assimilated semi-consciously, unacademically, under a driving impulse almost impossible to define. Fools interpret "Look in thy heart and write" as an invitation to set down anything that comes into their *heads*, in any manner,—but only fools! At the same time the artist is often but dimly conscious of the way in which he is obtaining an effect,—and it may possibly be a supreme effect. In fact, when the artist grows what we call "self-conscious" as to the use of his medium, he deteriorates as an artist. He has risen from the depth to the surface, he has lost intensity, he may be a virtuoso, a person skilled in the mechanical part of a fine art, but the dæmon has forsaken him.

And so we make an end. Sometimes it seems to me, wandering among the volumes on volumes on volumes of poetry which, in English alone, are our heritage, that if we could truly grasp and hold in our minds and hearts all the multifold implications, hints, revelations, intimations that the demiurgic spirit has scattered lavishly through the world to be interpreted by one art alone, we could create something more completely satisfying to the spirit of man than any of our religions of the world. For here is bewildering proof of the spirit *in* man, glimpses of potencies hardly guessed. In these volumes alone,—volumes of "poetry"! And there is so much latent poetry in experience, revived anew, fugitive anew with the tangle of visual, aural, mental impressions of every evanescent day!

W. R. B.

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I

THE BRAVADO

"And whereas their comming aboord was in a great bravado, with drumme, shouting and crying, they departed without either noise of drumme or speech."

—*Hakluyt*

CHANTEY OF *THE ARGO*

Orpheus has harped her,
Her prow has sheared the spray,
Fifty haughty heroes at her golden oarlocks sway.
White the wave before her flings,
Bright from shore she lifts and swings,
Wild he twangs the ringing strings,—
Give way! Give way!

Orpheus shall harp for her,
The Talking Head speak wise for her,
Lynceus look sharp for her,
Tiphys search the skies for her.
Long may Colchis curse the day when first she thundered free
And *The Argo*
and Jason
in glory put to sea!

Castor, there, and Pollux
That boxed Bebrycia's king,—
Warriors, seers and mages
At the rowlocks reach and swing.
But heirs to winds uproarious
The Twain, sons of Boreas,
With wings white and glorious
Magic are to sing!

Lovely Atalanta,
The buskined huntress maid,
The lad who stretched Procrustes
On the racking bed he laid,
And Hercules, whose infant thew
The hissing snakes of Hera slew,
And Nestor, strong to dare and do,
Bring home each dripping blade.

Lemnos lies behind us,
Ladies brave and gay;
Home, bring home the oars again,—
Give way! Give way!
Clashing islands gnash too late,
Fearsome highlands vail to Fate,
Worlds upon our venture wait,—
Pluck the harp and play!

Orpheus, the harp for us!
Prow of gold, speak true for us;
Lynceus, look sharp for us;
O Tiphys, steer her through for us!
Long shall Colchis curse the day when first she thundered free
And *The Argo*
and Jason
in glory put to sea!

MERCHANTS FROM CATHAY

How that They came.

Their heels slapped their bumping mules; their fat chaps glowed.
Glory unto Mary, each seemed to wear a crown!
Like sunset their robes were on the wide, white road:
So we saw those mad merchants come dusting into town!

Of their Beasts,

Two paunchy beasts they rode on and two they drove before.
May the Saints all help us, the tiger-stripes they had!
And the panniers upon them swelled full of stuffs and ore!
The square buzzed and jostled at a sight so mad.

And their Boast,

They bawled in their beards, and their turbans they wried.
They stopped by the stalls with curvetting and clatter.
As bronze as the bracken their necks and faces dyed—
And a stave they sat singing, to tell us of the matter.

With its Burthen

"For your silks, to Sugarmago! For your dyes, to Isfahan!
Weird fruits from the Isle o' Lamaree!
But for magic merchandise,
For treasure-trove and spice,
Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan,
The King of all the Kings across the sea!

And Chorus.

"Here's a catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan;
For we won through the deserts to his sunset barbican;
And the mountains of his palace no Titan's reach may span
Where he wields his seignorie!

A first Stave Fearsome,

"Red-as-blood skins of Panthers, so bright against the sun
On the walls of the halls where his pillared state is set
They daze with a blaze no man may look upon!
And with conduits of beverage those floors run wet!

And a second Right hard To stomach

"His wives stiff with riches, they sit before him there.
Bird and beast at his feast make song and clapping cheer.
And jugglers and enchanters, all walking on the air,
Make fall eclipse and thunder—make moons and suns appear!

And a third, Which is a Laughable Thing.

"Once the Chan, by his enemies sore-prest, and sorely spent,
Lay, so they say, in a thicket 'neath a tree
Where the howl of an owl vexed his foes from their intent:
Then that fowl for an holy bird of reverence made he!

Of the Chan's Hunting.

"And when he will a-hunting go, four elephants of white
Draw his wheeling daïs of lignum aloes made;
And marquises and admirals and barons of delight
All courier his chariot, in orfrayes arrayed!

We gape to Hear them end,

"A catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan!
Pastmasters of disasters, our desert caravan
Won through all peril to his sunset barbican,
Where he wields his seignorie!
And crowns he gave us! We end where we began:
A catch and a carol to the great, grand Chan,
The King of all the Kings across the sea!"

And are in Terror,

Those mad, antic Merchants! Their stripèd beasts did beat
The market-square suddenly with hooves of beaten gold!
The ground yawned gaping and flamed beneath our feet!
They plunged to Pits Abysmal with their wealth untold!

And dread it is Devil's Work!

And some say the Chan himself in anger dealt
the stroke—
For sharing of his secrets with silly, common
folk:
But Holy, Blessed Mary, preserve us as you may
Lest once more those mad Merchants come
chanting from Cathay!

THE MARCHING OF TIMUR

Sunlight shook on all the terrible shimmering shields of
Timur's armies
Marching to the Wall of China built by Chin the Only
First.
In brilliant colors flowed the clouds of Heaven that past all
guiling charm is,
Staunch forever, blind in love above a world in fury nursed.
Ho! the saddle is Timur's bed, his standards wave to music
royal.
Persian and Arabian horses toss their trappings, prance and
fret;
Scimitars gleam inlaid with silver, wielded by his captains
loyal;
Elephants bear his castled howdahs, solid gold with rubies
set;
Amyrs ride and sirdars ride and moguls ride on milky
horses;
Purple, green and crimson silks and turbans wound and tufted
shoes
Enrich his rustling retinue; the captains of his tramping
forces
Gleam in brass and silver studded on lacquered leather; and
hues confuse

And clash and swim through golden clouds of dust about four-poled pavilions
Full one hundred, floored with rugs of soft and glowing Bokhara weaves.
Ho! The loud imperious drum of state shakes out for all the millions
A deep-toned beat to time their feet. Thin soft tissues, silken sleeves,
Ivory arms and half-veiled faces swim in a mist from swaying litters;
Wild out-riders toss their lances flashing against the setting sun;
Pheasant feather and peacock plume from many a marching headdress glitters;
Bows on backs, a crowd of archers bronzely swings along as one;
Herds of antelope, goat and nihlgao straggle along the armies' fringes;
Mimicks, sorcerers and buffoons in particoloured costumes pass;
Dancing girls with golden anklets trip in the desert dust that singes;
High upheld above their bearers, banners stream from poles of brass;
Over all the embroidered arms of Samarcand, the City Splendid,
Lion and Sun and Three Great Circles, threefold realms that signify,
Blaze on a banner of gold brocade.
And, densely by his troops attended,
Odmar, leading the Avantguard, to a blare of terrible horns goes by;

His captains ride on piebald barbs; crescent scimitars slash
their sashes
Fifty thousand javeliniers rock past with a unison that thrills;
With light green marching loin-cloths bound, dark limbs on
which the sunset flashes,
Their front is spread like an open fan from the Eastern to
the Western hills.

Following these, the broad Battail, whose chiefs bestride black
stamping stallions;
Short-nosed men with blubber lips, drooped mustachios, scalp-
locks black;
Shaved heads gleaming, rank by rank they surge along in
huge battalions;
And sixteen squadrons of wheeling horse closely follow upon
their track.

And then, the shouting Arereward looms, its cavalcade of cap-
tains swarming,
Caps and sashes of figured blue, saddles and housings jewel-
bright;
By companies, forty thousand foot, behind the Prince of
Thanais forming;
And last, the Horse Adventurers, the Hope Forlorn.
And now the night
Creeps down as laden camels pass with melons and grapes and
dates all corded;
The flocks of bleating black-faced sheep; the lumbering ele-
phants once more;
While hundreds of yoke of oxen draw the great wheeled
houses, closely hoarded,
Covered with black or mottled felts, weird paintings splashed
on every door;

And chests of wickers on other carts, with birds and beasts
enscrolled for laughter;
The special tents of Timur's wives, their eunuchs striding
grim and tall;
White tents for peace, and red for war, and black for mourning following after.

Thus passed proud Timur's vast array that thundered down
on the great White Wall.

Over the bronze and rugged Western hills
The broad sun sank, a despot past his reign;
And, with the evening air that cools and thrills,
Great purple shadows crept across the plain.

The glitter and murmur of that marching host,
Whip-crack and rasped command and trumpet-call,
Animal ululations, all were lost
As an absorbing silence swallowed all.

The sun's death burnished metal here and there
To glance with light unknown to conquest's heat:
A light like courage battling through despair,
The sign of some victorious defeat.

From East and West the mountains leaned, and cast
Abroad the spreading cold. Out of the rare
Ether of summits it settled down at last
Through that pure flowing gold that was the air.

On neck and shoulder every man who dreamed
Felt the anointing. Then the first files leapt
A foaming torrent. And now the whole host streamed
Through a great gorge, wherein the waters wept.

The high rock walls reëchoed. But, pushing through,
"Halt!" rang the curt command from lip to lip.
For there the armies trembled at a view
Had won the Devil to apostleship.

And high on Timur's tall white elephant
The soft gold curtains of the howdah shake.
They part. The tyrant's eyes, now suppliant,
Stare like a seventh sleeper's roused awake.

So still—ah, God, so still! For far before
And far below their cliff, where veered the road,
Dim orange plains flowed like an open moor
To where, against the sky, the Great Wall showed.

Along a mountainous horizon low
Like a coiled frosty dragon-snake it curled,
Conforming to the summits' ebb and flow
And stretching to the ends of all the world.

Almost that mile-high mountain seemed to lift,
Sacred Pe-cha, beyond it,—for so clear
The cold was, that it set their minds adrift
On dawns in some far richer atmosphere.

A vast mysterious land,—its borders clung
With gorgeous fable. There silver maidens sang
And, from the haunted forests of Shantung,
Crawled forth the emerald Dragon King, Lung Wang.

From Pih-chih-lee's wide gulf to the dark gorge
Of the dragon's gate, a perilous Paradise,
Where grinning devils spat flame like a forge
And fox-wives wooed lost men with treacherous eyes.

Yes, there the oily Yellow River wound
By bamboo palaces and tortoise isles;
Enchanters fought with tigers underground,
And trees grew snow for miles on orchard miles.

And where the far Five Sacred Mountains rose,—
Rotund and almond-eyed, his slightest nod
Opening a fiery earthquake on his foes—
There sate in state the Jade Imperial God.

So through the dusk that softly came to shroud,
They gazed and marveled at the Great White Wall;
Grandees and horsemen huddled in a crowd,
The elephants' breathing pulsing over all.

By gorge and crag it seemed to crawl accursed,
Coiled back to watch them with a lingering eye:
That fitting triumph of the Only First
Whose wordless tablet crumbles on Mount Tai.

MORGIANA DANCES

(*An Arabian Night*)

Aha! A guest,—
Within my master's house, a guest,—
To eat
With his meat
No salt?
Say you so?
His vest—his vest—
What glitters through his merchant's vest?
Fast and fleet, tabor, beat,—
Round again we go!

Scarves about my head—so!
Silver girdle, flash—ho!
Round again, again we go;
Round again, again we go.
Chalk on the lintel lies,
Oil on the pave dries.
A guest, ho! A guest, ho!
A strange guest, ho!

Laden mules, laden mules
Clattered in the court there.
Who boil
In their oil?

The thieves?
Say you so?
Fools,—frantic fools,—
The moon saw the sport there.
Spin, spin,—tabor din,—
Round again we go!
Thieves' beards be red—so!
Poniard, forth and flash—ho!
Round again, again we go;
Round again, again we go;
Ali, only I divine
'Tis Hoseyn
Drinks your wine!
Mazed master, a guest—ho!
A sly guest, ho!

For treasure, for pleasure
Stabbed and plotted many men;
The fox
Picked the locks;
The springe
Snapped—so!
Pour measure, full measure,
Your purse for my dance then!
Purple are the shadows,
The lamps red and low.

The blade at my breast—so!
The blade at thy breast—ho!
Round again, again we go;
Round again, again we go . . .
Plunge, poniard!

Ha!—see,
Here's salt for villainy!
A guest, ho! A guest, ho!
A dead guest—ho!

HOW THE WINNING FOUR WENT HOME

Superb in pride we strained upon the golden chariot pole;
Around our necks were garlands gay and garlands decked the wheels that day.
Down from the temple thronged the crowd. "Since Pegasus was foal
Never such mighty steeds were bred as these of Rome!" the sages said.

But, sneering, that Ardelian swine cried, "Though thou hast the race,
Valerian, I yet deny thy fat and pampered steeds can fly!"
Our master turned. "This afternoon had proved it to thy face,
Did they allow such slinking shames as thou to view the public games!"

Yet in our master's cheek a flame flickered. We pawed anew.
" 'Tis sixty stadia to my home. I drive. I drive full speed from Rome,
Now,—when my steeds have won a race that strained their every thew!
I drive full speed to Love's abode. Set thy swift runners on my road!"

Braced in the footholds forward leaned our master with the word;
Forward we surged and struck our stride with eyes afire and nostrils wide.
Forth through the streets with thundering hoofs! And far behind we heard
A thousand people roar acclaim, shouting o'er all our master's name.

We flashed upon the seaward way swifter than shafts of fate,
Likened indeed to leaping flames, as once at the Circensian games
Some prætor praised us. Fair before the thin white road lay straight.
And swifter still we heaved and sprang till the strong chariot rocked and rang.

Oh, often from the splendid Hill the sounding march has wound
To cross the forum cheering us on to the Circus Maximus
Where seven times through din and dust the goals we girdled round,—
But now indeed more glory shone on the white road we took alone!

"A little villa hid in vines! A face I fain would see!"
So clear above our galloping we heard our master gayly sing.
"Claudia, Claudia, kind and grave, thine was the victory!
Thy kiss, thy trustful smile and calm more than all Idumæan palm!"

How often from our alcoves loosed we four have ramped superb,
The purple napkin for a sign fluttering down to launch our line
To sudden thunder of swift hooves in fury none could curb;
Yet now our master's happy song urged us as might no triple thong.

So soon, with Rome a dream behind, we snuffed and felt the Sea.
Through dust of gold we swerved and slowed our pace along the farmstead road
Under the rosy afterglow. 'Twixt darkening tree and tree
Her villa showed a square of light, yellow in welcome, low and bright.

And now we champ sweet grain indeed with thyme and clover strewn.
Fragrant Massilian is poured our master by his One Adored,—
Yet were her voice the rarer choice! And—yonder sails the moon!
Though slumber takes us, still they talk, low-whispering in the ilex walk.

THORSTAN'S FRIEND

Now when we were come to that bright gleam of waves
Frowned on by purple dusk, lit like a cave's
Dim gulph with fox-fire—too malicious lit
Before the thunder split
Heaven and earth with shattering peal on peal—
Under the canopied dark all Thorstan's steel
Flashed as he leapt upright
And stood with folded arms affronting night.

The great prow dragon-headed
His right hand clutched, as though that clutch imbedded
The mane of some proud steed by prouder master
Praised fiercely for dominion of disaster.

He spoke. It was as when the gull-king cries.
He looked, and all his life stood in his eyes,
And mine stayed, terrored, on his furrowed face.

So we two, and the ship, in that strange place
Were glassed within the storm's green evil light.

Then Thorstan raised both arms up to their height
And cried, "Thor!" (hearing the thunder) and cried, "Thor!"
Dropped arms, and cried no more.
His beard like mistletoe lay on his breast.

There is one track that all our fates attest
And when we reach the end it is well known.

So Thorstan cried no more. He groaned no groan.
He raised his head again and took my hand.
"You who come after, may you understand."
He gazed, mounting the bulwark. Flashing spray
Blinded my eyes. I turned my head away.

Then the storm burst. The dark blew out the day.

At the long last I lay along the shore.
Pennons of chilly light whipped in the west.
My limbs were leaden and I longed for rest.

Vikings, you will not find him any more.
He knew, who had reached his end.
To save him—would a man not save his friend
Before his life? But this was other kind.
He knew. I knew his mind.

And if I live the sun again will rise,
And if I live the moon be in the skies,
A warm hand touch me and a dear face see.

With him the thing was other. Such as he
Desire no crown of our dull victories. They
Fling from their eyes the jeweled glittering spray
Of kingdoms, and peer ever toward the west.

By such strange rending hunger dispossessed
Of steed, of store and stead, of wife and bairn,
Thorstan's gnarled body in some sandy cairn
Under the shifting tides lies turquoise-eyed.

But that, the ghost in Thorstan, doth not bide
By wet or dry or where we feel the air.
This heart within me knows it is not there.
(*My friend, my friend, my friend!*)
This heart says, crying, it is not the end.

Bringing no peace, it says—yet says and says;
For here—here was the parting of our ways.
I cannot know—but he? . . .

Broad lies the light along the level sea.

THE BALLAD OF TAILLEFER

On the judgment seat of Alfred,
Acclaimed by churl and thane,
Sat Harold the son of Godwin
With the sword of Athelstane,—
The Earl of the West Saxons,
With Edward in his mind,
Harold, Lord of Britain,
King of the English kind.

In Rouen fumed Duke William
And swore this should not be,
By the Mount of the Archangel,
By the saints of Normandy;
And Tostig, Harold's brother,
Northumbria's banished earl,
Spake with Harold Hardrada
And saw his fierce lip curl.

So the Norse returned to England
With fire and sword, and found
One gift from the golden Dragon—
Seven feet of English ground;
A shield wall by Gate Fulford,
Thick spears on a windy ridge,
The last of the ancient sea-kings
Routed at Stamfordbridge.

But below the Picard river
The south wind came at last
To the sails of all Duke William's ships.
His ships were sailing fast
North on the misty channel
When stars were glittering,
And under the "Mora's" lantern
A knight sang to the king:

Taillefer, Cleaver of Iron,
Bearing a name for the strong,—
Yet Taillefer, youth of laughter,
Thrilling the night with a song
Of Charlemagne and Roland,
Of a horn that mocked despair,
With a voice of youth and victory—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Brooding, the Conqueror watched him
And his rapt uplifted face,
Light of the eyes that challenged,
Freedom and strength and grace,
Merry, untouched by evil,
Open and frank and kind;
And a serpent stirred in the darkness
That filled Duke William's mind.

Through the wet wave at Pevensey
The armed host threshed to shore,
And the Duke would first have reached the land
But a light step leapt before.
First on the coast of England,
Bareheaded, with blowing hair,

Bounded that unleashed leopard,
The young knight, Taillefer.

Sudden abashed and halted
By the Conqueror's loud commands
He paused. Duke William tripped and fell,
The earth in his two hands.
"So I take seizin of England!"
He cried with a surly glare,
But caught youth's impish laughter
In the eyes of Taillefer.

Now a thane rode to King Harold
With tidings strange indeed,
And Harold marched for London
Ere the man could turn his steed,
Calling aloud to the muster
All sons of English sires;
The Dragon and the Fighting Man
Flamed southward through the shires.

And southward from London muster
And the rood in Waltham's fane
Levies pressed to the Standard
Of the troops that met the Dane,
Till they stood on the heights of Senlac
From all the shires and towns,
Battleaxe men and darters
High on a spur of the downs.

And south on the Hill of Heathland
Duke William, peering, vowed
A minster to St. Martin

Where the English gleamed like cloud.
To the blessing of Bishop Odo
Knelt men from Boulogne and Maine,
Poitevin, Breton, Picard,
That their hope be not in vain.

So the night passed. The morning
Grew gray in the chilly air.
The Conqueror summoned to his tent
The young knight Taillefer.
"Youth would go first!" He eyed him.
"Rashness best fits the fray.
Singer of songs of daring,
Lead thou the van to-day!"

With open eyes of wonder
Youth faced embittered craft.
Then, in a flash of vision,
Sudden the young knight laughed,
And a shaft of early sunlight
Struck gold from his tangled hair.
"By the banner of the Apostle,
Yea, sire!" cried Taillefer.

So beyond Telham northward
The Norman knighthood rode.
Billmen and jerkined archers
Through marsh and wasteland strode.
Toustain the White with the banner
Bright glimmering through the haze,
Odo in gleaming armour
By the Bastard of Falaise.

There was to cross the English fosse
And then the host stood still
Where that ash-woven barricade
Frowned from the sloping hill.
A burthened pause ere battle
About the hour of prime,
And sunlight burst upon the downs,
A lark began to climb,

And out from the Norman vanguard
Tossing his lance on high,
Unhelmeted, unheralded
Under the open sky,
On a charger that stepped like dancing,
With a song for all to share,
A vivid flame in the sunlight
Rode the minstrel, Taillefer.

Taillefer, Cleaver of Iron,
Bearing a name for the strong,
Yet Taillefer, lord of laughter,
Thrilling the day with a song
Of Charlemagne and Roland,
Of one hour that mocked despair,
With a glorious voice of victory—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Swift flew the sleet of arrows
As the English trumpets blew.
Up surged the host of Normans.
Blood glinted on the dew.
Warriors of Kent and Essex

Shouted defiance back.
Hildebrand's flaming ensign
Mounted to the attack.

But he tossed his lance and caught it
As his charger caracoled,
And high over horn and battle-cry
His ringing singing rolled
Taunting, immortal, haunting,
Superb on the sunlit air,
A gauntlet flung in the teeth of Death—
Taillefer! Taillefer!

Then they saw him reel in the saddle
And clutch at the saddle bow
And the fight closed on the hill crest
With curse and clashing blow,
Till at length on a blinded Harold
The shades of Senlac close
And deep in the heart of England
Burns the spear of her foreign foes.

THE PRIEST IN THE DESERT

(New Mexico—Sixteenth Century)

Now with no captained companies, when Cortez' fame burned
far,
High Marquis of the Valley, under the Western Star;
With no cuirasses ringing, no pomp of banner and sword,
Into the unknown North went forth plain men who served
the Lord.

The seven golden cities miraged the golden sand,
But serpents crowned fire-ringed them round, black angels
held that land.
Still Coronado's canyon yawns a chasm of awe and dread
Wherein pulse wizard blues of noon and hell-pits crumbling
red;

And rumored grotesque monsters, rock-realms of devilish
beasts
On gorgeous painted mesas, seemed gospel to the priests.
Infamous demons flapped the waste on black Satanic wings
With sulphurous breath of hideous death. All men believed
these things.

So once, in more than Hell's despite, north strode Fray
Estevan,
North from the New Galicia, scourged by the blazing dawn,

Sand burning under sandal, far-clumped mesquit and sage
Mazing his sneezing burro's steps,—the skyline quivering rage.

Deus in adjutorium meum intende . . . !" Now
The first five Joyful Mysteries smoothed clear his lifted brow.
At Prime he said his office through with fitting psalms and prayers
Though the sun a brazen giant clomb his Heaven's golden stairs.

That brazen giant lolled and gazed upon him, jowl on hands,
Tarantula and scorpion crept rustling through the sands.
When he said Tierce he felt the fierce scorn of those barbarous skies;
When at the next he came to Sext, all round flamed lions' eyes.

At None his thought, by small food stayed, wistfully strayed to Spain.
He saw the sanctuary lamp, the tall wax-lights again;
He saw the tabernacle veil crimson for Pentecost,
The censers swinging at High Mass, the lifting of the Host.

Fray Estevan, the Jesuit, wandered through cloisters cool.
He stopped to watch a mouthing carp gulp from the garden pool.
He heard his Novice-master's voice, he chanted from his stall.
Yet on from None he trod alone waste sands till evenfall.

The colors from far mesas died, blue mountains turned to black.
Ineffable, a cooler air breathed down the desert track.

At Vespers there were stars above—and shadows long and high;
The cactus took mysterious forms under the evening sky.

Wild treasure-cities, he had heard, crowded those cliffs so far.
Weird mythologic beast and bird shrieked there to sun and star.
The reek of mad blood-sacrifice sickened his sense afresh,
All devilish and ghoulish things wrought on the shrinking flesh.

His burro sneezed again, behind; gray gophers whisked aside;
Screamed a blue-headed pinyon-jay; a far coyote cried.
Then—stillness and the myriad stars, the swish-swish of the sand,—
And Satan's dark familiars prowling the desolate land!

He told his beads the three times through, striving with silent dread:
Pater Noster, Ave Maria, each added *Gloria* said.
His mind clove to the Mysteries, down to Our Lady Crowned.
Less loudly raced his heart, his feet more firmly gripped the ground.

Then, in the solitary night, he touched his burro's back.
The altar stone lay safely there, the relic in the pack,—
Chalice and paten and altar wine,—safe were the wafers too,
And alb and stole and maniple. Courage from each he drew.

Ah, clearly shone his sacred hour! He saw the Bishop stand. . . .
In awe once more he gazed upon his consecrated hand.

Bronzed! In moonlight? Not swathed in white? . . . Yet
fierce-white blazed that tryst
With Heaven! His heart leapt, feeling still the glorious yoke
of Christ.

So, lips apart as if for song, once more he raised his eyes.
Above the eternal star-sown worlds unfolded deeper skies
Even to that white bewildering Throne whence healing thrills
on men.
"*Deus in adjutorium—!*" his lips began again.

ROGUES' APOCALYPSE

"The Devil's Den" was the bousing-ken
Of Tom-o'-Bedlam and his Abram men.
Cutpurse, cogger and Egyptian swart
Banged leaden tankards, held high court.
With whey-white faces, patched and scarred,
Rogues of all races, evil-starred,
Wet their whistles, thumped with their sticks,
Brandished the crutch like a crucifix.

Softly sifted the goose-feather snow
From plum-blue night to the Town below,
On crooked streets cobbled, on red roofs peaked,
Where shutters clacked and a sign-board creaked,
Where wavered and fell a golden spotch
From the passing lanterns of the watch,
Rug-gowned halberdiers searching for the
Moon-men painted Moorish-swarthy.

The Gypsies' jackman, bold Jack Kettle,
Bounced from his seat on the firelit settle.
"The gift of a tongue, to all 'tis given,
So up, bully boys, in a song of Heaven!"
And "Heaven!" that mort of wild rogues roared
As leaden tankards crashed on the board,
"A song of Heaven—and set to an air
For the ballad-singers of Stourbridge Fair!"

Bawled Pitch, the pirate, straight from Devon,
"Aye, clapper-dudgeons, a song o' Heaven!"
"Some jack o' the clock-house," shrieked Meg the Harlot,
"Shall write it after in gold and scarlet!"
And a tinker, hung with his pewter dishes,
Crack-brained, cackled of "loaves and fishes,"
When in through the door on their sudden gabble
Floated a music that stilled the rabble:

First
Some harp
Like a sword-blade sharp
Clove through azure ether
With an edge like fire;
Then
A horn
In a harsh gold scorn
Trumpeted rebellion over wind and wire;

High over towers and gray walls graven
The sun was a lion that ramped through heaven;
Deep under jasper cliffs where it curled
The mist was a snake that swallowed the world.

Wilder the minstrelsy swelled and gayer,
Bright in the door, like a strolling player,
Stood a man in a cloak like fourfold wings—
Flickering fingers on flickering strings.
Then, as though at a "Silver ram! trim-tram-
Pass-presto!" the walls of the building swam
To mist. They were 'ware all around him there
Of a glittering crowd in the blue night air:

Raphael, Michael and Gabriel,
Uriel and Jeremiel,
Nephelim of the sons of Seth,
(Pharaoh's children caught their breath!)
Rank on rank of the troops that trod
Where Jacob visioned the camps of God,
Mentors of David and Elias,
Guides to Daniel and Zacharias!

Around them thrilled that Voice of wonders
That spake to John as with seven thunders.
From their lips went forth the troublous word
That Daniel in Shushan's palace heard;
Like clean wool flowed their straight attire;
Like burnished brass, like a silver fire
Their beauty blazed that consumed earth's daughters;
"The noise of their wings was the noise of waters."

All crouched and quaked at the shine and burning,
At the roar as of wheels within wheels turning.
Then Night came clap; that wild event
In glittering rose through the firmament,
Upward streamed through a crystal heaven
The inner cordon, the Mystic Seven,
Their wingèd cohorts whirling, whitening . . .
From the wintry sky there went forth lightning.

Jack Kettle gaped. He was long past speaking.
From Tib the Tinker came rabbit-squeaking.
Though Pitch had fought blood-slippery decks, he
Wallowed now in an apoplexy;
But Meg stood forth where all fell prone:
"In the likeness of a sapphire stone . . ."

She whispered, "I see the darkness riven;
He comes with power in the clouds of Heaven!"

And afar
A harp
Like a sword-blade sharp
Clove the azure ether
With a burning strain;
On high
Some horn
In a silver scorn
Rang for resurrection from the pit of pain . . .

The echoes ended. The dawn's faint rose
Slowly crept over ghostly snows.

TURPIN AT VAUXHALL

Turn-keys, tipple your purl again,
Toast your shins at a midnight fire;
Hiccough of famed high-Toby men,
Robbers of bagman, lord, and squire!
Newgate ghosts, with a ghostly wreath
Crown the rogues that your tales recall,
Gay flash gallants of Hounslow Heath
Cantering forth from Hatton Wall!

In a brilliant barge from Whitehall stair,
Sue and Thisbe, pretty Miss Prue,
Up azure Thames through evening air
Close to the Vauxhall landing drew.
Turpin, late from the great North Road,
On the Grand Cross Walk surveyed the crowd
Where temples, pavilions, statues glowed
Under glittering lights in a rosy cloud.

Bow Street runners, patrols forgot,
Where peer and poet in tie-wigs paced
'Twixt mimic cascade and goblin grot,
(Gay coats full-skirted, flowered and laced,)
Where coloured like crocus gleamed each gown—
Bright eyes a-sparkle from fan or hood—
Where red lips chattered the talk of Town,
In the midst of it all Dick Turpin stood.

Thronged by gallants they passed him by,
Thisbe and Prue, on their conquering way.
The surf of voices swelled loud and high.
The booths were crowded, the music gay.
Old legends awoke in Turpin's mind,
(His nostrils tingled with *eau de luce,*)
Of Colonel Blood and of Captain Hind,
Of Claude Duval—and the hangman's noose!

He turned, a-shiver. In ambuscade
His black mare waited. 'Twas near the hour . . .
Down graveled paths to a darkling glade,
He checked—at a sound from a shadowed bower,
A muffled shriek! With whipped-out sword
Bold Turpin burst through a screen of vine
As Prue, in the grip of a maudlin lord,
Flinched back from a table splashed with wine.

By a twist of the neckcloth spun about
Highwayman collared blustering peer.
"You have lost me a Bishop's coach, past doubt—
Have periled my neck, you must pay me dear!
So, my Vauxhall fowl, be you neatly trussed;
And, I beg to relieve you of—this—and this;
One move—and I lessen with cut and thrust
The proper price for a lady's kiss!"

'Twas thus, in the summer-house, gagged and bound,
With oyster eyeballs that glared to curse,
Marveling maskers at midnight found,
Purple and mottled, Milord Fitzurse . . .

But, slowly reined from a meteor ride,
Where low in the sky dimmed London Town,
Turpin's mare struck a dreamlike stride
Under the starlight, over the down.

Musing, her rider stroked her mane,
Twirled a white rose he stooped to smell,
Pursed his lips as to tune again;
"Strange," he murmured, "what then befell—!
And I must live—" (and his smile was young)
"I must live a rogue—who have lost a bride;
And indeed, my dear, I shall live to be hung!"

He was hanged at York, come Eastertide.

THE IVORY SWORD-CANE

French horns frolicked a gay fanfare.
Somerset drowsed in the sunset air.
His outriders' jackets a coloured blaze,
Harness a-jingle on six sleek grays,
The Beau's post-chariot neared the wells
To a silvery peal from the Abbey bells.

Fashion that strolled by the river-path
Saw the Beau, with a flourish, flash through Bath,
His cream-coloured beaver for all to note—
Ivory sword-cane, gold-laced coat.
Clarissa, with snowflake hand on breast,
Stood thrilled by his chariot's gilded crest.

She, of all ladies who sipped the waters,
(Furbelowed dowagers, simpering daughters!)
In minuet or the country dance,
Through evenings spent with the God of Chance,
At coffee-house concert, pump-room meeting,
Was the toast of the town and the season's sweeting.

Close at her elbow her father's choice
Of her suitors leered, with beguiling voice;
A Cowcross rogue in complete disguise,
A blackbird to peck out a starling's eyes,
A quondam pickpurse louting low
As a rumored peer in incognito.

Candles winked in a green baize room.
Guineas of gold lit a golden gloom.
Fiddle and hautboy moaned afar.
Over the sycamores one green star
Pierced the window. Clarissa tossed
Her future on Hazard—won, and lost.

The rakehell behind her glowered down
On her soft bronze hair and her crocus gown.
The small cubes flickered. He watched intent,
With courtly murmur and compliment;
Eyes of greed like the eyes of an asp,
Fair and fortune within his grasp.

Flutter and whisper. Behold the Beau,
From a fling at basset and pharaoh!
"Your pardon, my dear!" He checked her hand.
To the other he turned with a light command:
"A moment's speech, I beseech Your Grace!"

. . . . . .

So they stood on the terrace face to face.

"There are questions, sirrah, might well abash—
And the lady involved is my niece," says Nash.
"So—despite all rules—since offense is rank,
Let us stroll, Milord, to the river-bank!"

There they drew. Where the Avon rinsed the stain
Nash wiped with a flourish his slim sword-cane.

MASTER OF THE FLYING CASTLE

When white canvas towered in tiers
From the sealine, cloud by cloud;
When from roadstead out to offing
All the sea gleamed thick with fame,
In from Java and the East,
From the lairs of god and beast,
With a wake like mermaids dancing,
Aymar's "Flying Castle" came.

She was laid in Port o' Moonbeams,
She was launched in Noah's prime,
She seemed older than the triremes
As we peered from headland grass.
In her hold was gold and cedar
Out of Tarshish, Tyre and Edar
And she trailed a bannered sunset
On a tide like burning glass.

Aymar, Master of the Cove,
Every salty shipwright knew,
Everywhere a rope was rove
Or a mate signed on a crew;
Trim white house with hollyhocks,
Walk of shells and hedge of box;
Meet him rolling down to harbor,
Buttons blazing from his blue.

Bought a black in Mozambique,
Some outlandish port of call;
Brought him home that very week
When we watched her tower so tall;
Be a gardener for the lady,
Keep her little garden close.
How we watched him weed of mornings
With the bangle in his nose.
Soon enough the "Flying Castle"
Faced the seas where Auster blows.

Talked like Choctaw, did the black;
Lifted gentle dark dog's eyes.
But we scouted through a crack
In his shanty—and were wise.
He would hold the withered charm
High with one long apelike arm,
Muttering, moaning, as he swayed,—
Till we crowded close together,
Hurrying homeward—yes, and prayed!

When the Autumn storms were brewing
And the trees were leaved with flame,
Like a lover to proud wooing
Home the "Flying Castle" came;
Goblins jigging in her rigging
Were the freezing flaws of spray;
Every samphire-bearded Triton
Greenly hailed her on her way.

Plunging, rearing like a stallion
In the trough and through the crest;
Bulking golden as a galleon
On the witchcraft of the West;

Purple night in all the shrouds
Of her tropic-tinted clouds,
Till the headland flowered its beacon
And the Fiend stood manifest!

Mumbling more and more by fits,
White of eyeball rolled askance,
Worked the black's weird secret wits,
Till we feared and fled his glance,
Till one night the dark infernal
Ritual rose to dim nocturnal
Toil by moonlight—oil and kindlings—
And a trancelike moonlight dance.

Blood was smeared upon the portal.
(Only voodoos understand.)
Out of terror stark and mortal,
Shriek on shriek—a smothering hand.
Then the crackling rose to roaring
And the swarms of sparks went soaring
And the house flared like a pharos
To the "Castle," close off land.

. . . . .

Aymar's face was gray and shrunken,
Aymar's voice was but a croak,
Aymar's eyes were charred and sunken,
But they burned you when he spoke;
Tottering palsied, as if drunken,
Through hushed streets he did not see;
And the "Flying Castle" rotting,
Sunk and sand-filled, off the quay.

THE TYPHOON JUNK

On that dead sea like burnished brass,
Becalmed within a soundless bell
Of sky and water smooth as glass,
To Jabez Stone this thing befell,—

To Jabez Stone, a son of Maine,
Aboard the barque, "Matilda Lee,"—
The thing that may not chance again
Till Azrael shrivel up the sea.

Its clear reflection moored the barque
Where Jabez lolled against the wheel;
And then, his head was raised to hark,
His eyes were drawn to points of steel.

First—'twas not there; and then—'twas there,
Distinct in blunt outlandish shape:
A craft evolved from empty air,
To stir his hair and fur his nape.

A prow grotesque, a slatted sail;
Ocher, vermilion, cobalt blue;
Sly grinning masks along the rail;
A silver furrow following through.

The air rang eddying round that ship;
High on its poop a lacquered lord
Sate plumed, with proud mustachioed lip,
Gripping a great two-handed sword.

In gorgeous silks, it seemed he slept,
Yet, at his moving lips' behest,
From each deep sleeve some dark thing crept
That crawled, all jeweled, on his breast.

Green-feathered, up the rigging's gold
Clung plump and twittering parrakeets;
Gray clambering lemurs from the hold
Seemed fruitage of the shrouds and sheets.

And then all hands stretched up full height,
Clanged gongs, and as a single man,
Behind the rail abased from sight. . . .
Far off an eldritch wail began;

It grew; it grew; the sky went dark
As Jabez clutched the wheel and peered.
Spectral with phosphorus glowed the barque.
The eldritch wailing neared and neared.

The junk burst forth in gold and red.
Aloft, like spitting cats in flight,
From taloned hands such sparkles fled
As, fusillading, filled the night.

With trailing tails of glittering gold
Beaked birds of fire through blackness screamed;
Incessant suns the midnight scrolled;
A wind arose like something dreamed,

A wind whose violence took the breath,
And raised the sea and laid it low
And span it in a dance of death,
So fearfully it came to blow.

Then Jabez, bawling through the foam
To muddled hands at last aroused,
Saw, brilliant as Aladdin's dome,
That golden junk, with purple housed,

Tilt high on waves that had no crest,
Its birds, its apes, its lacquered lord
Ablaze with light,—his hands at rest
Upon his great two-handed sword;

While, all around, that eldritch wail
Swelled to a screech to wake the doomed:
For plain upon the slatted sail
A giant fire-bird perched and plumed,

Great pinions floating east and west
Of Titian and of Tyrian dye,
Its crested head upon its breast
Lit with a fixed and smoldering eye!

It glared. The world went whirling black
Where men might hardly cling and be,
Breath blown from mouth, shirt ripped from back,
In whirling spiraled sky and sea. . . .

And how the barque emerged from Hell
Still staggering through a dying blow
To drift dismasted down the swell
At ashen dawn, I do not know.

Perhaps because the things that seem
Have power beyond the crimsoned moon;
Perhaps that Jabez, in a dream,
Beheld the God of the Typhoon

Whose sorcery through disaster leapt
To save, and spread his warning wide
Lest others sleep as one had slept
Becalmed upon the Orient tide,

Even Jabez Stone, that son of Maine,
Aboard the barque, "Matilda Lee,"—
Which thing may never chance again
Till Azrael shrivel up the sea.

THE SKATER OF GHOST LAKE

Ghost Lake's a dark lake, a deep lake and cold:
Ice black as ebony, frostily scrolled;
Far in its shadows a faint sound whirrs;
Steep stand the sentineled deep, dark firs.

A brisk sound, a swift sound, a ring-tinkle-ring;
Flit-flit,—a shadow, with a stoop and a swing,
Flies from a shadow through the crackling cold.
Ghost Lake's a deep lake, a dark lake and old!

Leaning and leaning, with a stride and a stride,
Hands locked behind him, scarf blowing wide,
Jeremy Randall skates, skates late,
Star for a candle, moon for a mate.

Black is the clear glass now that he glides,
Crisp is the whisper of long lean strides,
Swift is his swaying,—but pricked ears hark.
None comes to Ghost Lake late after dark!

Cecily only,—yes, it is she!
Stealing to Ghost Lake, tree after tree,
Kneeling in snow by the still lake side,
Rising with feet winged, gleaming, to glide.

Dust of the ice swirls. Here is his hand.
Brilliant his eyes burn. Now, as was planned,
Arm across arm twined, laced to his side,
Out on the dark lake lightly they glide.

Dance of the dim moon, a rhythmical reel,
A swaying, a swift tune,—skurr of the steel;
Moon for a candle, maid for a mate,
Jeremy Randall skates, skates late.

Black as if lacquered the wide lake lies;
Breath is a frost-fume, eyes seek eyes;
Souls are a sword-edge tasting the cold.
Ghost Lake's a deep lake, a dark lake and old!

Far in the shadows hear faintly begin
Like a string pluck-plucked of a violin,
Muffled in mist on the lake's far bound,
Swifter and swifter, a low singing sound!

Far in the shadows and faint on the verge
Of blue cloudy moonlight, see it emerge,
Flit-flit,—a phantom, with a stoop and a swing . . .
Ah, it's a night bird, burdened of wing!

Pressed close to Jeremy, laced to his side,
Cecily Culver, dizzy you glide.
Jeremy Randall sweepingly veers
Out on the dark ice far from the piers.

"Jeremy!" "Sweetheart?" "What do you fear?"
"Nothing, my darling,—nothing is here!"
"Jeremy?" "Sweetheart?" "What do you flee?"
"Something—I know not; something I see!"

Swayed to a swift stride, brisker of pace,
Leaning and leaning, they race and they race;
Ever that whirring, that crisp sound thin
Like a string pluck-plucked of a violin;

Ever that swifter and low singing sound
Sweeping behind them, winding them round;
Gasp of their breath now that chill flakes fret;
Ice black as ebony,—blacker—like jet!

Ice shooting fangs forth—sudden—like spears;
Crackling of lightning,—a roar in their ears!
Shadowy, a phantom swerves off from its prey . . .
No, it's a night bird flit-flits away!

Low-winging moth-owl, home to your sleep!
Ghost Lake's a still lake, a cold lake and deep.
Faint in its shadows a far sound whirrs.
Black stand the ranks of its sentinel firs.

II

THE DISPITEOUS LIGHT

"Ye who by understanding move the third heaven, hearken to the discourse which is in my heart, for I may not tell it to any other, so strange it seemeth me—"

—*Dante. Ode XV.*

MAN POSSESSED

Shaken, a thousand times shaken, with the millions that grieve,
Now at last I am overtaken. I will say I believe.
I ran with the pennons of morning astream over me.
On the precipice, scorning its warning, I ran to be free.
Still I love high winds and the great running and the steep
verge,
But strength past my strength overtakes my cunning, and
stars emerge
High over me, eternal, deathless, deep over deep,
And my head sways heavy as I run breathless, my eyelids
droop with sleep.

Yet it is not this has shaken my soul in me,
Not the bounds of life have overtaken my will to be free,
But scent and sound past mete and bound, and a sign—a sign
That no other eyes can recognize, that is only mine.
I hardly know what I believe or what I mean
Save there is sweetness round my heart and the world a screen
Of interwoven mystery to a world unseen.

Can one drink the air, can one seize the sea, can one grasp
the fire?
Even so intangible to me the answer to my desire.
The elements we feel and see shift and drift and suspire
And we therein behind the screen, with glimmering brains
that tire.

That is all! Nor can I fall now in the race.
As a second breath to a runner comes my soul takes up the pace—
For I dreamed the world ran with me in a far and starry place.

Gray as sea-mist driven were the shapes that strove
With the strength of greed and hate and the greater strength of love.
I saw their eyes like phosphorus, blue fog about them wove.
I saw the limbs glimmer and I heard the sighing come
From this side and from that, as our host ran dumb
Over a silver shining plain, to some strange end, to some—
Was it goal or heaven or city?—some agonizing gleam
That broke the heart for pity and made the eyes stream.
Above the pallor of that race our spent breath rose like steam,
Yet our red hearts pulsed within us, as we ran, in my dream.

A glow below the ghostly surf that swirled and surged and turned
Came from human hearts visible that throbbed and beat and burned,
And like sand of human ashes was the soil our feet spurned.
All the stars above us thronged the dome of space,
Poised like javeliniers, with glinting spear or mace,
Watchful of our running and to spoil our race,
And all the souls that ran, ran with drawn and lifted face.

This too was the real. I ran with dogged heart.
I parched like a desert, tortured in every part.
I knew not what city—nor why the race should start.

Then a singing touched me, and the scent of a flower,
A child's laugh, and the crying of a woman in her hour,
And a comrade's courage—and a subtle power

Not of worldly schemes and ways crept along my veins,
And my heart went ablaze and consumed its many stains,
And my lips were touched with wine and my body felt no pains.
Then it passed—and yet again it came and it passed—
Yet again and yet again, till I toiled at last
In the old ironic torture, bound fast, bound fast.

But as I looked I saw how it came and went,
That touch, that communion, almost inevident,
Through the host of these my brothers who ran nigh spent.
When it came they ran like men with life and lung
And the wind went by them like a song bravely sung,
Their hearts spread wide radiance, their limbs glowed young.
It passed, and they were phantoms with phantom arms that swung.

Here and there a true form some spirit would endue
For moments, but we mortals were but ghosts, I knew.
Then a light low down before us to a distant landscape grew.
The stars from heaven crowded down. I knew our race was through.
The stars from heaven crowded down intolerably bright
With dizzying brilliance, height above armored height.
Every star upcast a spear and hurled it down to smite.

There was one strange thought in me. It echoed through my head
As some titanic corridor echoes a giant tread,
Only a little thing that my love once had said.
Common daily speech, a comforting word
Tossed to me as lightly as crumbs to a bird,
But it lived in my heart, it broke to flame and stirred

My self to a purpose at last not self could mar,
And I cried, "We are delivered!" and I heard it echo far
Up to the vault of heaven past star on shrinking star.

So then I was running through poppies that I knew
Above a blue sea basking—and you—and you
Were running on the headland in the world made anew.

I know some force is mighty, some force I cannot reach.
I know that words are said to me that are not said with
speech.
My heart has learned a lesson that I can never teach.
Only this I know, that I am overtaken
By a swifter runner Whose breath is never shaken,
That I follow on His pace, and that round me, as I waken,
Are the headlands of home and the blue sea swinging
And the flowers of the valleys their fresh scents flinging
And the prophets and the poets, with their singing—with
their singing!

THE FALCONER OF GOD

I flung my soul to the air like a falcon flying.
I said, "Wait on, wait on, while I ride below!
I shall start a heron soon
In the marsh beneath the moon—
A strange white heron rising with silver on its wings,
Rising and crying
Wordless, wondrous things;
The secret of the stars, of the world's heart-strings
The answer to their woe.
Then stoop thou upon him, and grip and hold him so!"

My wild soul waited on as falcons hover.
I beat the reedy fens as I trampled past.
I heard the mournful loon
In the marsh beneath the moon.
And then—with feathery thunder—the bird of my desire
Broke from the cover
Flashing silver fire.
High up among the stars I saw his pinions spire.
The pale clouds gazed aghast
As my falcon stoopt upon him, and gript and held him fast.

My soul dropt through the air—With heavenly plunder?—
Gripping the dazzling bird my dreaming knew?
Nay! but a piteous freight,
A dark and heavy weight

Despoiled of silver plumage, its voice forever stilled,—
All of the wonder
Gone that ever filled
Its guise with glory. O bird that I have killed,
How brilliantly you flew
Across my rapturous vision when first I dreamed of you!

Yet I fling my soul on high with new endeavor,
And I ride the world below with a joyful mind.
I shall start a heron soon
In the marsh beneath the moon—
A wondrous silver heron its inner darkness fledges!
I beat forever
The fens and the sedges.
The pledge is still the same—for all disastrous pledges,
All hopes resigned!
My soul still flies above me for the quarry it shall find.

JALDABAOTH

[There is a third person in a Gnostic Creation legend from which the name of my demiurge is derived. The true legend—a snake-worshiping one—has it that Darkness, the Father of all, begot a daughter, the Wisdom of God, who knew Life; the son of her agony being Jaldavaoth, the god who creates. He creates the world of the body, a clumsy imitation of the world of the spirit, etc. But the only borrowing from this legend has been the name of my protagonist. This is an entirely dissimilar imaginative attempt.]

In a yeast of fire-flecked mist
Beyond the paths of the planets
Strove Jaldabaoth, the strong Angel, the son of Chaos.

In that terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine Nature
In whose pleroma the sage Heracleon
Saw emanating eons—assigned and ordered
Subordinate gods—
Time was but faint effulgence,
Scarcely a tremor in the ether.
Psyche, the sensuous soul,
Was lost in the palpitant pneuma
That quivered like heat round a flame, where Jaldabaoth
Wrested with Chaos.

Be it The Word, or the Reason,
As bandied by Hellene and Hebrew
From agora to horned altar—
With Christian sects disputing

Of incorruptible substance
And its fleshed phantasmal appearance,—
Be it one of these, or another
Simpler, more marvelous mystery,
Yet, remotely irradiant, the Logos
Still summons its demiurges
To labor and toil in the Void.

So strove Jaldabaoth,
The strong Angel, the son of Chaos,
Kneading and shaping and molding
And working and welding a world
Out of the ether,
From the negation of matter,
Alone in the wreathing, seething, monstrous mist.
Alone.

Terrible trembling and shuddering shook the abyss,
Like the rumbling hollow drums of brute barbarians
Thudded instant in repetition, purring to thunder,
Breaking and booming and roaring high to a crepitant crash
And a dazzling lightning flash,
With billows of purple smoke, rolling to inky storm,
Following after.

Then far and faint came laughter,
Tricklings of infinite laughter,
Thin streams of molten silver scattering down
Through the heavy heaven of cloud,—
Remote and ironic laughter.

Yet still strove Jaldabaoth, demiurge divine,
The strong Angel, the son of Chaos,—

Grappling the clotted and fluid cloud to his breast,
Gripping with bulging-muscled enormous thighs
The cloud-stuff to him—striving and struggling with cloud
Even as Ixion, saith legend, begat the centaurs
When Juno slipped from her white and cumulous semblance
Back to the shining gates,
Back to the laughter-clanging golden gates,
Leaving her bronze-thewed lover frenziedly clinging her
image,
Clasping celestial cheat.

Horns in the heaven,
Flaring horns of scorn from the corners of heaven
Wound wire-cruel sound
And fierce flagellation
Round the soul of Jaldabaoth.
But in his arms
As clay is kneaded and worked
A world took form.

Then the strong Angel
Stooped 'neath his feet for a fiery sun,
Shattered it 'twixt the gripe of his fingers, let fall
The glistering, glowing fragments in midst of his world,
Strewing the shards as a man sows seed,—
Scattering them.

And again,
And again
He kneaded and worked his world between his knees
Till his eyes were blind with sweat.

Jaldabaoth
Flung forth one arm, and snatched a golden web
Of glimmering stars out of the misty abyss,
And crushed them to paste against the arch of his thigh
And powdered them to fine dust beneath his heel
And mixed them into the spinning maelstrom of his world,
And his world quickened and twirled and shaped toward a sphere.

His world convulsed, and flickered with gaseous fumes,
And flared into flame.

And Jaldabaoth drenched it with hissing mist.

His world flung off planet on planet
Like smoke-rings or bubbles blown.
They spun in eccentric orbits . . . Cent'ring them all,
The coagulate matter dwindled and dwindled to throbbing pulses
Of rosy or crimson embers,
And so diminished
Into a central sun
Of quivering heat and light.

And that first sun cooled, and the planets clanged in anger,
And hissed in mist—and another glowing sun
Swam forth, and other orbits ellipsed its Space.

Jaldabaoth was resting.
He squatted on sinewy heels above his world
Of little silver planets and golden suns—
And infinitesimal gems of sapphire water
Winking back from some turning sphere.

He had not yet made Man.

His agate eyes were full of the lack . . . but behind him
Came God, as one walks in a garden, and laid his touch
On his shoulder. And the flame-haired head flung back
And Jaldabaoth looked into the eyes of God.

And God breathed on his Angel's world,
Making Man.
And God drew blue skies like the folds of a cloak about
his face
And trod once more on his rounds of Eternity
To the next white outpost of the next demiurge.

Then languor and idleness came on that strong Angel.
Centuries passed as he slowly turned on his side
And stretched luxuriously,
For he was weary.

And then first on his eyes he was 'ware of a prickling and
tingling
And then a tremor that startled through all his being,
A tremor he could not still.
His lazy lids opened. He peered through cloud on his world.
It spun in its Space with a small and rhythmic sound.

Yet something like a fizzing of very tiny flies
Perturbed its whirl.

And again the pricking and tingling through the being
Of Jaldabaoth.

For upon its smallest of planets, on one of the tiniest islands,
The first, fur-skinned, flint-axed Doubter had whispered "Why?"

Then Jaldabaoth was wroth, and he sent a plague and an earthquake,
And the voice was still.

And the Angel sank back, and slumbered, and centuries passed.

Again the pricking and tingling,
More irritant now, more and more insistent. . . .
Cities were spread on one planet. In one of the cities
A scientist in an infinitesimal laboratory
Laid his weary forehead down 'mid a stench of bubbling test-tubes
And shuddered "Why?"
And out of the alleys of cities
Oppression and extortion and filth and famine
Fumed upward "Why?"—and in a house of healing
A surgeon with baffled scalpel above a twisted wreck, half-human,
That his work had saved to life, cursed coldly "Why?"
A farmer's wife, scanning an empty prairie,
Echoed his thought.
A clerk at his desk, a doughty general dying,
In half-delirium, played with the answerless question.
Youth and age and houses of death and birth
And camp and court and land and sea, unceasing,
Reiterated the word in many tongues.

"Is there a God? Who is our God, and Why?
What is this life? And *Why?*"

Jaldabaoth, rousing, gazed at his world
With wild new wonder . . .
And, as he gazed, his gaze
Grew microscopic, and centered upon one city
Set in the midst of a planet, and on one house
Set in the midst of that city, and on one room
In the house, and the smiling face of the man in that room.
The smile was not good to see.

The man sat at a desk littered with papers,
A pen in his hand.

The man's lip curled, as he said:
"God or no God, I had made a better world.
God or no God, I defy you, I blaspheme you.
All has been taken from me except one thing—
My hate of you.
Your priesthood is great—for all men are afraid.
But I am not afraid.
I am the least of atoms in your bad universe,
Urged to obey your laws.
Fed with fancies, creating superstitions,
Cheating and killing each other,
Juggling their Justice and Sunday Righteousness,
Clutching, snarling and denying,
Your 'children' swarm on this planet, and crawl to Fear.
But I am not afraid.
Visit me now with sudden and visible torture,
Kill me slowly in one of your sweet and infinite
Tortures reserved for the brave,
Shred me between your fingers now or soon,
After your high and holy Godlike fashion;

Set me riddles, and kill that I cannot solve them,
Damn the brain and the heart you made to beat
Out of your infinite mercy . . .
I am not afraid.
I hate you, I blaspheme you!"

The earth-creature's brain sucked down the very soul
Of Jaldabaoth, and laughed and mocked in its light.

And the son of Chaos looked on his son of chaos
And saw no fear.

Then Jaldabaoth was afraid.

With a vast and terrible wrench he freed his eyes
And his soul from the eyes and soul of the earthly brain.
And the form of the man on earth swayed in his chair
And sprawled to the floor in death.

But fixed in the being of Jaldabaoth, he became
A troubling mote, a stinging vexation of spirit.
So the strong Angel rose, and staggered, and reeled
Through the terrible, trembling abyss of the Divine Nature,
To find God.

But God was with His Angel as a vast and invisible power
That knew his questions: "Why have You made us then
To make such toys?" and, "These toys are terrible,
A vengeance, a sharp disaster!" and, worst of all,
"I have miscreated! Fiends, we are fiends, we are fiends!"

The eyes of the Angel dilated and diminished
With blazing torture, the ether shuddered around him.
He whirled in his steps as if to strive with God.

But God was both near and remote, and could not be grasped.

Then down in utter agony, Jaldabaoth
Sank, and the darkness was sick with his horrible tears.
And over and over again,
"What is this Life we have played with!" he sobbed and
sobbed.
"What is this Life—and *Why?*"

Then, speaking in perfect silence, God answered, saying:
"You too are only a thought within my brain,
A figment of my fancy,
A thing contrived.
But that which is created in my fancy,
A part of my thought,
Can never die, but must have eternal life.
For I am eternal, awfully eternal,
And there is no end.
But my thought had pity on me,
And it made for me metes and bounds, and anger and tears,
And joy and sorrow . . .
And eons, and angels, and men to rejoice and despair.
I am the father of all, unutterably lonely,
Save for my thoughts that are ye.
Ye all are stored in my memory that is Heaven.
There shall ye rest.
But while ye are my thoughts ye can have no rest,
For my Thought is forever the drudge of timeless time . . .
But when my own thought sickens, I seek for a new
Mood and manner of thought . . .
Therefore come rest in my memory, Jaldabaoth.
This mood of my thought is done."

And the voice ceased, and the void reeled, and the strong
Angel
Basked in the retrospect of the infinite brain.

ANIMALCULE

Dark and prodigious caverns clanging
A war of words still unforgiven,
I heard a golden tongue haranguing
Against the very founts of heaven;

I heard a silver tongue rehearsing
Strong jubilance that lingered ringing;
In my own spirit was the cursing,
In my own spirit was the singing.

With fangs like flames the voices tore me,
Shuddering swift their tide shook through me,
The blessing and the curse that bore me
Ravaged through midnight to undo me;

But why they strove, or why I tortured
Myself, before the day might brighten,
I knew not, knowing not how are nurtured
A brain and nerves such nightmares frighten.

Despair and aspiration sounding
Through tiny veins and threadlike gristle,
Vast hunting shapes of darkness hounding,
With flying hoof and whistling missile,

The morsel mind; the round night rending,
Time poised upon a revelation,
Fierce clamor of some choice, ascending
From all the throats of all creation—

Ere, far too trivial for loathing,
One speck within vast star-space lying
Awoke, arose, resumed its clothing,
And crawled another day toward dying.

THE STALLION OF NIGHT

When the soft gray-breasted evening, a carrier-dove, goes freed,
Cloaking the world with her wings as she floats from the hand of God,
Then sunset streams over heaven like the mane of a galloping steed
And the soul is absorbed into silence like water that seeps through the sod.

Then with eyes on the wild horizon where all of my dreams redeemed
Glow and take form with the colours of cloud and of changing light,
I behold the splendor that flies on the race that all poets have dreamed.
Ere my ears are athrob with his hoofbeats, I have looked on the stallion of night.

His mane is the flickering golden flare of the sun as it sank.
Black of withers and breast and haunches he looms on the violet West.
The pride of his lineage is told in the strength of each heaving flank,
The star of the evening sparkles full-rayed on his noble crest.

He gathers and reaches to running where clouds are the drifting smoke
Of his hooves that spurn the mountains, where stars are the sparks that fly.
Dark on the skyline, stunning the hills, whence echoes broke
Hard on his drumming gallop, he surges and thunders by.

Phantasmal—a vision—to vanish dislimned as a film from the sight . . .
Dazed by such star-bright heavens, I must turn from their splendor soon.
But my heart may never banish the dream of the stallion of night
Who stamps at the fords of the starlight and neighs at the gates of the moon!

THE LAST ALLY

He fought for his soul. The stubborn fighting
Mastered his strength.
"Endless indeed this long requiting!"
He cried at length.
"Six times have I come where my first hope jeered
And laughed me to scorn.
O now I fear as I never feared
To fall forsworn!"

"Ah, when they fight upright and at me
I give them then
Blows as shrewd as those combat me;
But now, again,
They struggle and writhe like fiends escaping.
Underhand
They flicker and strike. My wounds are gaping.
I reel to stand.

"Six battles' span; by this gasping breath,
No pantomime!
'Tis all that I can. I am sick to death.
A seventh time?
Not for all crowns and thrones hereafter!" . . .
He stared wide-eyed:
Like a knight in glittering armor, Laughter
Stood up at his side.

ANVIL

Above the frowning forest, in his fiery open smithy,
Behold the huge artificer of all the years to be!
"On cloud-hung crags of vision, what wanderer thou, I prithee?"
"I climb from Man to find the plan—" "Then learn of me!"

His sledge is mountainous adamant; its weight is thunder;
The souls are on his anvil laid like sword blades bright.
His sledge's swing is lightning and cataclysmic wonder,
Its impact on the leaping soul, both Morn and Night.

And this is the song that he has for mighty singing,
"The blade that writhes beneath the sledge, white-hot, cold-blue!
The anvil—the anvil—the anvil's giant ringing;
And hissing from its bath of stars, the soul steeled true!"

The smithy's walls are lightened as by a forest fire,
And first the smith was looming wrath, and then vast peace.
His lineaments are joy and peace, his thews can never tire;
The starry bath beside his hand is called Release.

The souls are hot with flashing sparks; the souls have voices,
But drowned in the reverberance of that huge din;
And in his strength the smith is glad, and in his calm rejoices,
And flings the flame to cold Release, to hiss therein.

His face glows joy, his face is ever lightened
Not cruelly but radiant with the justice of his trade;
Behold the dullest metal to beauty brightened,
The bent and dinted, flawed and scarred, like blue steel made!

"For Man I toil, for men have no regretting;
So toil I joying to be just to each through all;
As due them all I true them all, no flaw forgetting,
And in a like perfection they hang upon my wall."

"But what is called your anvil? You name names madly."
"The state men flee and cling and flee and would retest;
For all the glory of mine anvil, Heaven sings sadly;
The soul of all perfection knows mine anvil best."

I keep within my heart this song of his for singing,
"The steel that writhes beneath the sledge, white-hot, cold-
blue,
The anvil, the anvil, the anvil's giant ringing,—
And, hissing from its bath of stars, the soul steeled true!"

THE FUGITIVE

The little foxes in their holes
Slumber curled, as the moon goes by.
The running winds are like fleet foals
That follow a leader up the sky.
The stars are like a chime of bells
Ringing, swinging from west to east.
The foxes doze and dream of smells
And barbarous, beatific feast.

The night within the wood is dark,
Blind as the treacherous mind of man.
All savage things that crouch to hark
Forget wherefore they cried and ran.
The cruel heart of nature sleeps,
But over the hill the soul is blown
To azure heights and infinite deeps
Where stars like sparkling seed are sown.

I would be running with the wind
Afar from lives that murder lives,
Up the steep air where thought is thinned
In the keen cold that cuts like knives;
I would be buffeted, blown apart,
Lost and absorbed in space and height;
Out of the body, brain and heart,
One with the ecstasy of light.

But tethered are the feet that start,
Fast tethered is the mind that strains.
The beat of your relentless heart
Will only pay your soul with pains.
The blank ironic day will break.
Time will outwag all other clocks.
So fall, and may your laughter shake
A chill into the stoic rocks!

MAD BLAKE

Blake saw a treeful of angels at Peckham Rye,
And his hands could lay hold on the tiger's terrible heart.
Blake knew how deep is Hell, and Heaven how high,
And could build the universe from one tiny part.
Blake heard the asides of God, as with furrowed brow
He sifts the star-streams between the Then and the Now,
In vast infant sagacity brooding, an infant's grace
Shining serene on his simple, benignant face.

Blake was mad, they say,—and Space's Pandora-box
Loosed its wonders upon him—devils, but angels indeed.
I, they say, am sane, but no key of mine unlocks
One lock of one gate wherethrough Heaven's glory is freed.
And I stand and I hold my breath, daylong, yearlong,
Out of comfort and easy dreaming evermore starting awake,—
Yearning beyond all sanity for some echo of that Song
Of Songs that was sung to the soul of the madman, Blake!

HIPPOGRIFF

Cut clear as an obelisk
Against the vermilion disk
Of the moon at the mountain's summit,
A shoulder, a swordlike wing
Of some superhuman thing,
A shape that drops like a plummet.

Its wings spread eagle-wise,
Its arms are over its eyes,
There is hint of talon and horn;
It dives, a monstrous wraith
Of the truth none know as faith
To the night whence it was born.

Like bronze are its feathers curled,
Its throat is parched with the world.
When the autumn moon is a spell
It veers down a slant of light
From night into deeper night
With a sound like a singing shell.

Was an angel repulsed of his peers?
Is a portent seen through men's tears?
Are we gods gone mad and athirst?
What specter confronts the midge
Who climbs to this cloudy ridge
Of twilight, and sees the worst?

It will not ever be known,
Nor the troubling of that groan
Cease through the archways of night.
It is gone. The moon is in cloud.
The mountains are mute and bowed
With its wild, disastrous flight.

THE SILVER HIND

Through the black forest
You glance, you start,—
Through the black forest
That is my heart;
Beautiful, silver-heeled,
Swift as wind,
Topping the brake
Like a flying hind.

I have a bugle
Of ivory
The wizard of twilight
Gave to me;
I hear it winding in my heart,
In the black forest, where you start.

And I know,
Like huntsmen in gold and green,
My thoughts spur past
Where you have been,
And like hounds that have slipped the leash
They race,
Bell-tongued beagles
Upon your trace.

Through the black forest
You reach, you run
Out of the shadow
Into the sun,
And the hunt behind
Is lyric and loud
Where horses and hounds
And huntsmen crowd.

But you are gone,
O, you are gone
Out to the blaze and glory of dawn,
Leaving the print of blood-red anemones
In the mold, and echoes of ancient glees
Shaking like silver leaves on my somber trees!

"FOR THE EYES LOVED—"

T. F. T.

For the eyes loved,
For the face lifted
In that still light,
Dark trees are groved,
The snow drifted,
And the mound white.

And the grave dug
And the words spoken
And the flowers shed—
And the eyes tearless
But the heart broken
For the brave dead.

Though a soul thrill
To the stars' fire
And a mind sing
To a keen will
Of a high desire
And a great thing,—

Ah, who listens?
Who—who hearkens

Or answer makes,—
Though the moon glistens
And the night darkens
And the heart breaks?

Lay her sword by her,
Her steel of spirit,
Her phantom blade,
Lest the loud liar
In his hell inherit
What her soul made!

Sweet sword, she came
To pierce and quicken
My heart to grace,—
Oh, white flame,
Oh, nobly stricken,
Oh, deathless face!

ACCOSTED

"If you saw blue eyes that could light and darkle
With merriment or pain;
If you saw a face that was only heart-lonely
In the cities of the plain;
If you felt a kindness that was happy as daybreak,
Patient as night,
And saw the eyes lift, and the dawn in May break,
You have seen her aright.

"Blue-cloaked archangel, rein your steed a little,
Though cities flame;
Messenger of night, though my words are brittle,
Though I know not your name,
Though your steed is pawing sparks and your pinions quiver
With colours like the sea,
Tell me if you saw her, if you saw my love ever!
She is lost to me.

"That is why I walk this windy highway
And stop and hark
And peer through the moonlight—always my way—
And listen up the dark
And knuckle my forehead to remember her truly,
The very She;
And that is why I cling your rein unduly
To answer me!"

But his eyes were deep and dark, though somehow tender.
Haste was manifest
In the gauntlet, the greaves, the irid splendor
That pulsed on his breast.
He did not even gesture to the night grown holy,
But shook his rein
As his steed leapt forth; while I—turned slowly
To the cities of the plain.

THE WOMAN

You could hurt and you could heal,
You could hide and still reveal,
You were lilies, lilies and steel.

You the near and you the far
Were as lamplight and a star.

I cannot tell them what you were;
Yet, Death, you have not all of her.

No, I, the passionate nondescript,
Have wine your lips have never sipped,

Have wine of her in my heart's blood
Whom I never understood.

You were tender and benign,
Trusting—and all fire divine
And a constellation's sign.

You the far and you the near,
You heaven high and heaven here,
You the quest, and closest dear.

Ah, God, you have not all of her,
For still my cause she can prefer
Where she goes, and where You were.

You could weep and you could rise
With the Word clear in your eyes,
With a strength beyond the wise.

Girl and goddess, will and love,
Struggling, battling, winged above
Memories I have memory of!

NIGHT

Let the night keep
What the night takes,
Sighs buried deep,
Ancient heartaches,
Groans of the lover,
Tears of the lost;
Let day discover not
All the night cost!

Let the night keep
Love's burning bliss,
Drowned in deep sleep
Whisper and kiss,
Thoughts like white flowers
In hedges of May;
Let such deep hours not
Fade with the day!

Monarch is night
Of all eldest things,
Pain and affright,
Rapturous wings;
Night the crown, night the sword
Lifted to smite.
Kneel to your overlord,
Children of night!

III

TO E. W.

"The honor which is hers cannot be said;
To whom are subject all things virtuous,
While all things beauteous own her deity."
—*Guido Cavalcanti.*

THE NAME OF LOVE

O Love, a thousand, thousand voices,
From night to dawn, from dawn to night,
Have cried the passion of their choices
To orb your name and keep it bright,

Until, however tides may vary
At neap or ebb of life and breath,
Your influence is planetary
Upon this body of our death,

And that dark sea that takes the dying
Kindles along its coasts to flame
For thousand, thousand voices crying
The exaltation of your name.

THE BLUE HOUSE OF AIR

In the blue house of air
  How burning bright,
How fragrant for delight,
The flowers that are not there!

In the dream without walls,
  How fainting near
Your loveliness, how clear
The golden sunlight falls!

It is the world's a wraith,
  My spirit sees,
All earth's black cruelties
Less than the tears of faith,

Less than this poised despair,
  These ghostly flowers,
These still, heart-broken hours
In the blue house of air.

DOPPELGANGER

I'm waiting for myself, sitting up too late,
Waiting for myself to come back to-night.
I saw myself go out of a moonlit gate
And turn to the right . . .
I saw myself, a midge on the silver face
Of the moon, trudge up the sky,
And through the molten silver and fine-spun lace
Of clouds, go by.
I saw myself come to that misty house
On the other side of nowhere, where you are.
Discreetly hidden under whispering boughs
It gleams like a star.
The door glowed open. "Oh, it's you!" you said . . .
So I sit here waiting—with Fate—
And I wish Myself would get back
For I ought to go to bed
And he stays so late!

FALCON

Whose eyes have pierced that tragic East
Where a miraculous sun ascends,
Whose flight has hovered above that feast
The lion makes, with lesser friends.

Whose scimitar wings through darkness break,
Through icy cold and gold of dawn
To slant across a lilied lake
And sheathe upon a lilac lawn,—

Proud flier, I can read aright
The bleak, keen brightness in your eyes,
Though cruel wings hunt down the height,
Curved talons track the cruel skies.

Buzzard and vulture linger low
To tear man's heart, but higher, higher
Into a zenith light you go
Unguessed of kite or lammergeier;

And here, upon my shoulder set,
Unhooded, freer than aught that flies,
You bring the heavens' star-spangled net
Trailed from your beak to blind my eyes;

So only since your pride is mine,
Your love of all things wild and fleet,
With golden and with crimson twine
I tie these bells about your feet.

MOON RIDER

A sky of deepening bronze
Seemed tolling like a bell.
Blue ice filmed shriveled ponds.
Snow, whispering, fell.

Trees traced a frieze of black.
One window's spark
Flecked gold upon the farmyard track,
Brightening with the dark.

He cinched the saddle on the colt
That snuffed his hand.
The bar was slid, the bolt
Shot. The open land

Lay ghostly still from hill to hill.
He sprang. They were gone.
Like foam below them tossed the snow.
Hoofs beat on.

Blurred in the eyes like unshed tears
Stars crackled overhead;
The wind a flickering shears
That snaps a thread.

Swift between drifts the flooding thud
Ran muffled on.
Straight at the moon he rode
In goblin dawn.

Dark trees to one high house
Closed round him up the drive.
He reined in hush that seemed to rouse
The voice of all alive.

Pebbles that, spattering, ticked the glass
Awoke a crocus stain.
He saw her shadow pass
The blinded pane.

Over the snow-choked portico
The house leaned heavy-beamed.
A footfall light, a footfall low.
The fanlight gleamed.

Cautious, the oak both groaned and spoke.
One golden bud of flame.
Shadows tall thronged from the hall.
Name breathed to name.

In frosted heaven the moon's shell
Filled, overflowed with light,
Welling like ringing of a bell
Through the lingering night.

ETERNAL MASCULINE

Neither will I put myself forward as others may do,
Neither, if you wish me to flatter, will I flatter you;
I will look at you grimly, and so you will know I am true.

Neither when all do agree and lout low and salute,
And you are beguiled by the tree and devout for the fruit,
Will I seem to be aught but the following eyes of a brute.

I will stand to one side and sip of my hellebore wine,
I will snarl and deride the antics and airs of the swine;
You will glance in your pride, but I will deny you a sign.

I will squint at the moon and be peaceful because I am dead,
I will whistle a tune and be glad of the harshness I said.
O you will come soon, when the stars are a mist overhead!

You will come, with eyes fierce; you will act a defiant surprise.
Quick lightnings will pierce to our hearts from the pain in our eyes,
Standing strained and averse, with the trembling of love that defies.

And then I will know, by the heartbreaking turn of your head,
My madness brought low in a hell that is spared to the dead.
The upas will grow from the poisonous words that I said;

From under its shade out to where like a statue you stand,
Without wish to evade, I will reach, I will cry with my hand,
With my spirit dismayed, with my eyes and my mouth full
of sand. . . .

SMOOTH-SLIDING MINCIUS

Sullen in the sun's eye,
Whining in the rain,
Pipe low, pipe high
Why we live, why we die,
Why we dream of pain!

Hell is humming in your heads,
Your eyes blankly glare,
Famine stands beside your beds,
Imps crawl your chimney leads,
You eat your own despair.

I do not know—I
Am glorious being sad,
Posturing in tragedy,
Fitful as the clouds be,
Melancholy-mad;

Lowering in a gloom of rain
I read an ancient curse,
But sunset's the court of Spain,
Stars that sparkle in my brain
Dim the universe.

So let it be, let it be,
Fretting all the day!
What is this or that to me
Who talked it out in Tartary
Centuries away!

Yet a while with love I stroll
Bright streets of air,
Silver precincts few extol,
Mist-blue cities of the soul,
Countries here nor there . . .

Wasteful in the sun's eye,
Wistful in the rain,
Passing by, passing by,
So I live, so I die,
So I dream of pain.

FIRE AND GLASS

The thistly yellow flame flows up like water,
The dusk brick glows.
Fashion the ropelike glass; your lip can blow it
To a vase like a rose,
To a goblet curved like a wave, with a stem like a lily.
Glass can be spun
To frailer lace than the cobweb brown old spiders
Weave in the sun.

Not pure gold ingots nor all the renown of iron
Nor the blushing brand,
Nor crackling cataracts of molten metal
Kissing the sand,
So praise this cleanly and bewildered fury
Potent to shape
Emerging contours scintillant as diamond,
Smooth as the grape.

O self-consuming sun, the dew-on-the-gossamer's
Delicate glint,
What symmetries petaled and pearled and fragile as flowers
Take form and tint
From this fierce unslakable thirst and famine of fire
Cold stars control!
Even thus, O love, through the blood's rebuked rebellion,—
Thus my soul—!

THE FAWN IN THE SNOW

The brown-dappled fawn
Bereft of the doe
Shivers in blue shadow
Of the glaring snow,

His whole world bright
As a jewel, and hard,
Diamond white,
Turquoise barred.

The trees are black,
Their needles gold,
Their boughs crack
In the keen cold.

The brown-dappled fawn
Berefit of the doe
Trembles and shudders
At the bright snow.

The air whets
The warm throat,
The frost frets
At the smooth coat.

Brown agate eyes
Opened round
Agonize
At the cold ground,

At the cold heaven
Enameled pale,
At the earth shriven
By the snowy gale,

At magic glitter
Burning to blind,
At beauty bitter
As an almond rind.

Fawn, fawn,
Seek for your south,
For kind dawn
With her cool mouth,

For green sod
With gold and blue
Dappled, as God
Has dappled you,

For slumbrous ease,
Firm turf to run
Through fruited trees
Into full sun!

The shivering fawn
Paws at the snow.
South and dawn
Lie below;

Richness and mirth,
Dearth forgiven,
A happy earth,
A warm heaven;

The sleet streams,
The snow flies;
The fawn dreams
With wide brown eyes.

THE OLD ADAM

All night rain fell,
All night unwound a heavy glistening skein.
Two slept well
Beneath thick leafage curtained by the rain.

All night wind blew unending,
All night pursued the same despairing themes—
Triumphal music blending
With love's triumphant dreams.

All night the forest crept
With stealthy life and little lanterned eyes;
All night rain wept,
A wild wind roared, and deep in Paradise,
Flame-sentineled, high-walled,
The corpse-cold serpent crawled.

Two slept. Toward morning
Eve murmured, Adam woke
And comfortingly spoke,
Then—open-eyed—
Recalled it all,—the Warning,
The strange Beguiling,
The Word defied,
The Exile that ensued . . .

And so lay smiling,
His heart held breathless with beatitude.

THE CRYING

Something in my spirit
None save you can share,
Crying I inherit
From a clear height of air,

From a globed sun burning
Like a fiery coal
To indignant yearning
Within my soul.

You love me. I am strange,
Escaped at a breath
From this fever of change
Between life and death.

A terrible crying
Turns my heart to brine;
For a long dying
Through life is mine.

Sometimes then
Say your pity with your eyes
For the deep den
Where a wild thing cries.

Loosen the chain,
Let me rave and roam.
I will come again
To my only home.

I will strive to never grieve you
With that furious war;
O, I shall never leave you
Alone any more!

I will lay my head
Overwearied on your knee.
From the crying of the dead
You shall deliver me.

THE UNJUST WORD

When the unjust word is said
And sudden dumbness of the dead
Weights me like a leaden cloak,
All glitter and gleam before you spoke,
Fiery sparkling, light and thin
As gold betwixt gold-beater's skin,—
When burnished plumage puffs to dust
And, moving on because I must,
I gasp to bear the staring thrust,—
Never fear,—oh, never fear
Some silent wall is builded here!
Nothing's here of iron or stone,
Only a shuddering wraith alone
Meeting with blank and haggard eyes
Insult from outrageous skies,
Desperate for a voice to call
Across wild distance, through it all,—
Dismayed before a world so old,
Numbed and withering in the cold.

But as a man who travels light
Through glacial chaos, through the night,
Toward habitation past a bleak
Torment of crevasse and peak,
Calming his hammering heart beneath,—
So, through an age, I grit my teeth,

Willing with every underbreath
A shattering of this sudden death.

Shattered it is! The whole sky clears
To iridescence of our tears.
Heart against heart a moment after
The world is whirling round our laughter.

When the unjust word is said,
And rending trumpets rouse the dead,
If then a hawk of shadow hovers
Above the frantic clasp of lovers,
Look! Your word is in my breast,
Who know its fluttering fears the best;
Throbbing wild, its scornful woe
Tells me all I did not know;
From fierce pursuit of destiny
I shall protect it deep in me,
Shelter it for eternity,
Smooth and soothe this vivid bird
That sings the light—your unjust word.

BRAZEN TONGUE

Quick in spite I said unkind
Words that should have struck me blind.
Flatly on my eardrums rung
The raucous echoes of my tongue.

Burnished bees in an iron hive
Seemed my wits, and scarce alive
I sat with elbows on my knees
Sick with silence like disease.

Slowly through the solid floor
I sank, till there was nothing more
Than a grease-spot of me there
Shadowed by the upright chair.

O last night I lay awake
Parrying darkness for your sake,
Like an armory glittered bright
The lilied hours of our delight.

O this morning I intended
All the virtue this has ended,
Golden as a new-coined planet!
Now I wither into granite.

Tongue, you are a tongue of fire,
Shriveling like a white-hot wire,
Blackening like a dragon's breath
Flower-fluttering fields with death.

Tongue, you are a tongue of brass
In the jawbone of an ass,
Slaying what was most divine,—
Not the reeking Philistine.

So, she dug me from my quarry;
Came and said that she was sorry;
Sprinkled me with words like myrrh;
So I sat and stared at her;

And so I climb the burning mountain
And sit beside the lava fountain,
And, white with ashes, wonder why
In the devil I am I.

MIDNIGHT SPEECH

Deep in the dark
A spark quivers;
Our tranced speech
Is light round a lark,
Far-wandering rivers,
A moon-bright beach,

A dark way home
Of starlight blind;
Under thick grass
In warm loam,
For the tired mind,
A dream that will pass.

The night breathes
Our single breath;
Speech so slight
Like bright wreaths
Round the head of death
Garlands the night.

MIMI AND THE FOREBODING FROST

Clear glass
By thick frost
Furred white.
O *alas!*
All is lost!
It is night!

No, I'll breathe,
Rub a round
Bright eye.
Snows that wreathe
Ghostly ground,
Leaden sky!

Flakes that pass!
They are wasted,
Thinned,
Where the glass
Has tasted
The wind.

Look! The light!
White and gold,
Gold and blue

Is the night
Was foretold
To you.

At a breath,
For a tear,—
Do you see?
Night and Death?
O my dear,
Look at me!

WE ASK NO SHIELD

No shield against our crying griefs,
Our sudden rages, black beliefs,
We boast,—but in default of shield
A tragic candor stands revealed
We would not change for any targe.
Let Time's dark archers loose at large
Their quarrels in a whistling press,—
They cannot shake this steadfastness!

Often as fools amazed we cried
For pain, and would have turned and died;
And still as fools amazed we play
Ironic parts on many a day,
Yet something adamant in us
Confronts with scorn the ominous;
Bright in our eyes its laughter springs,
Wild through our blood its triumph sings.

Strike me to earth—but I will rise
With this same earnest in my eyes;
You cannot slay yourself in me,
Nor I—to all eternity—
Destroy my truest self in you.
All that our ingrate thought would do,
All senseless wounds we give and take,
Are powerless—for the other's sake.

We ask no shield against our griefs
Though shadowy arrows fly in sheafs.
Hand in hand is gripping hard
Though all black heaven be thunder-barred;
Eyes on eyes are burning clear
Though Hecate and her hound be here.
No futile, human, vain distress
Avails to shake our steadfastness!

THE WOODCUTTER'S WIFE

Times she'll sit quiet by the hearth, and times
She'll ripple with a fit of twinkling rhymes
And rise and pirouette and flirt her hand,
Strut jackdaw-like, or stamp a curt command
Or, from behind my chair, suddenly blind me;
Then, when I turn, be vanished from behind me.

Times she'll be docile as the gentlest thing
That ever blinked in fur or folded wing,
And then, like lightning in the dead of night,
Fill with wild, crackling, intermitting light
My mind and soul and senses,—and next be
Aloof, askance as a dryad in a tree.

Then she'll be gone for days; when next I turn,
There, coaxing yellow butter from the churn,
Rubbing to silver every pan of tin,
Or conjuring color from the rooms within
Through innocent flowers, she'll hum about the house
Bright-eyed and secret as a velvet mouse.

'Tis not your will They do,—no, nor the Will
That hushes Anselm's chapel overhill.
Something that drifts in clouds, that sings in rain,
That laughs in sunlight, shudders in the pain

Of desolate seas, or broods in basking earth
Governs Their melancholy and Their mirth.

Elusive still! Elusive as my reason
For trudging woodward in or out of season
To swing the ringing ax, as year by year
The inexplicable end draws slowly near,
And, in between, to think and think about it,—
Life's puzzling dream,—deride, believe, and doubt it.

But if I leave her seriously alone
She comes quite near, preëmpts some woodland stone,
Spreads out her kirtle like a shimmering dress
And fills my mind's remorseful emptiness
With marvelous jewels made of words and wit
Till all my being sings because of it,

Sings of the way her bronze hair waves about
And how her amber-lighted eyes peer out;
Sings of her sudden laughter floating wild,
Of all her antics of a fairy child,
Of her uplifted head and swift, demure
Silence and awe, than purity more pure.

So I must scratch my head and drop my ax,
While in her hands my will is twisted wax;
So, when she goes, deaf, dumb and blind I sit
Watching her empty arm-chair opposite,
Witched by evasive brightness in the brain
That grows full glory when she comes again.

PRIMUM MOBILE

Prismy shafts as clear as glass
Climb through golden glooms and dun.
Struck athwart them, sunbeams pass,
Black though tempest hide the sun.
Down a vivid blue crevasse
Sudden stars are wildly bright.
Rondured like a dome of brass
Light deceives from height to height.

Hissing serpentines of rain,
Streaming storms of hail are hurled,
Swirled and sown abroad like grain
Here, above the whirling world;
Vast and vague, as in a brain
Quick with all the pricks of sense,
Clouds of ever-changing stain
Coil and drift to confluence.

Ghostly spawn of vortices,
Spinning deeply dark and dim,—
Phantoms known as flowers and trees,
Seas where glittering fishes swim,
Rooms—like these—where sit and talk
Beings of most curious grace,
Streets where hurrying shadows walk,—
Somehow, then, emerged from Space.

All this world of Me and You,
Each preëminent event,
Twinkles like a spark of dew—
Nucleus of a firmament.
Vast and oceanic flame
Fades before one beam of eyes.
Sound of a familiar name
Echoing fills enormous skies.

Place your hand upon my heart
Lest some shattering blast be blown,
Lest these four walls flash apart
And infinity its own
Claim in flame.
Yet, as your face
Turns to meet my inmost dreams,—
There was—something—Outer Space—
How preposterous it seems!

SONG SHELL

On woven needles brown and fine
Tinged faintly gold by daylight dying,
Beneath the benedictive pine
The shell with curving horns was lying.

Its ebony and burnished round
Breathed sound too silvery for sighing,
A rippling rill from gloom profound,
A lilt half mockery and half crying.

Cradled in ivory, ruled with rays
Of frost from Cynthia's carven crescent,
In shadow of the glooming bays,
In glimmer of the furtive present,

With elegant and singular,
Clear and ironical precision,
The lyre flaked music like a star,
Rang with a voice and sang a vision.

No vandal hand may ever part
These wires that own their god Apollo
To find the human, frightened heart
Athrob within its armored hollow;

But though the gold, the iron note
Aloft in light forever hover,
A shy, secretive, vesper throat
Here too (I thought) enchants the lover.

IV

PERSONAGES

Or sapchon ben miey hom e miey baron,
Angles, Norman, Peytavin e Gascon,
Qu'ieu non ay ja si paure compagnon
Qu'ieu laissasse, per aver, en preison;
Non ho die mia per nulla retraison,
Mas anquar soi ie pres.

—*Richard Cœur de Lion*

GASPARA STAMPA

"Saffo de' nostri tempi alta Gaspara"

VENICE — CINQUECENTO

"I burned, I wept, I sang; I burn, sing, weep again,
And I shall weep and sing, I shall forever burn
Until or death or time or fortune's turn
Shall still my eye and heart, still fire and pain."

Like flame, like wine, across the still lagoon
The colours of the sunset stream.
Spectral in heaven as climbs the frail veiled moon,
So climbs my dream.
Out of the heart's eternal torture fire
No eastern phœnix risen—
Only the naked soul, spent with desire,
Bursts its prison.

O love, magnificent and dreadful love,
At last consuming heart and brain,
Palling all days with thoughts we weary of,
Weary of pain,—
O golden city set in the sun's heart,
Isled in a golden sea,
Yet what a vague phantasmal counterpart
Of what might be.

Darkness comes down upon your domes and towers,
Dark gondolas gliding under evening bells.
Deep night spreads burning over faded hours
The hell of hells.
The shadows mock me with his step, his sigh.
The treacherous tapers flare
And flaw; but though I stare with burning eye
He is not there.

Collalto, my illustrious lord, it is
So strange! One word, one sign
Would turn, like Cana's metamorphosis,
These tears to wine,
Wine from my heart—or shall my blood be shed
To seal the crumpled scroll,
Who gave you living, who would give you dead
Body and soul?

Capitals, columns, arches, sculptures fall,
The ivy crawls on Istrian stone;
Tower and palace, chapel, drawbridge, all
Time leaves prone;
Only our Alps whose blue without one stain
Blends into higher light—
My namesake stream of the Trevisian plain—
Time finds bright.

Yet will not Time, kind to the Paduan, scroll
My name at last with yours,
Vittoria, Veronica? If the soul
Of song endures

I grasp eternity. O barren bliss
Beside pomegranate flowers
Swayed in the moonlight, and one secret kiss,—
Bliss once ours.

For France is far, so far, my dearest lord,
Beyond the Alps so far, men say,
One little word, even one little word
Loses its way.
Is it not piteous then to die, to live
In death, to gasp unheard
In thirst unslaked for what one word could give,
One little word?

And for a faith to tread consuming heat
And for a love to look on death
And to go robed in fire, in fire complete,
With sharp-drawn breath,
While the trapped heart, grown frenzied with its pain,
For joy once scorning fate
Storms with wild wings, again and yet again,
Your iron gate?

The gods returned to earth when Venice broke
Like Venus from the dawn-encircled sea.
Wide laughed the skies with light when Venice woke,
Crowned of antiquity,
And, as with spoil of gems bewildering earth,
Art in her glorious mind
Jeweled all Italy for joy's rebirth
To all mankind.

And we were heirs, true bounden heirs of this
Epoch of glittering life and bannered love
Even as we whispered in our earliest kiss
The joy thereof,
Ere sunlight on a condottiere's lance,
A bitter trumpet blown,
Scattered your words and swept your heart toward France,
Left me alone.

The hyssop on the reed, this, this to drink
In this dark hour shall seal it as the last.
No words, my lord—and no more thoughts to think
When this is past.
Titian awhile his garden walk may tread
And Sansovino keep
My words, words you may read when I am dead,
But I would sleep.

LEGEND OF MICHELOTTO

So it befell, because the times were hard,
This Michelotto, Captain of the Guard,
Nigh to Cord Lane, in a vile drinking den
Lingered the last of Cæsar Borgia's men,
Having found beyond Viana, in the vale,
That stripped, stark, blood-laced body, prone and pale,
Fixed eyes and wolf-teeth glittering to the stars.
Thus last he saw the Duke. So from all wars,
All coil of camp and court, he fled Navarre
To live at hazard by the outlier's star
Scornful of every faction—old and grim.

This was a night when musing fell on him,
Secret in Rome, strayed lately from the sea.

Sprawled on his lousy pallet it seemed that he
Was multiplied in forms around the room
Where on the floor a lantern made the gloom
Even more invading by its little light.
Some fifteen Michelottos were that night
Regarding him from all sides of his bed.
He clutched again the wineskin, and his head
Turned slow each way; his eyes revealed their whites.

This was, perhaps, one of his troubled nights,
For suddenly that raped Venetian bride,
Caracciolo's, crouched by his bedside
With hair disheveled, eyes glaring wildly round.

One feels it discommoding that the drowned
From Tiber rise and walk, and come thus late;
Nor, boy Astorre, should you, smiling, wait
Blue by that window-grate the moon shines through.
Those emaciated wraiths that crowd round you
Forget how kindly you were used anon.

"Ecco! These two were vilest. Smilest? Smilest
Thou—thou—or thou, mine image? Fiends, begone!"
Thus, elbow-raised, the gulping sbirro cries,
His coarse dark hair fallen tangled in his eyes.

He turned again. His hand groped for the wine.
There gleamed the poniard-hilt 'twixt neck and spine
Driven home. It quivered yet. Ah, how the wan
Forehead, blood-smeared, and dark eyes of this man,
The wried mouth gaping to its gurgling cry,
Called back the Ghetto midnight. . . . How they ply
Dagger on dagger till heavily he falls!
Sparks flit from flints. Beneath the bagnio walls
Wheels the white charger, champing at his load.
Truly not thus a Captain General rode
Ere this through Rome!
So Gandia; let us hope
That Don Giovanni, captain to the Pope . . .
But no, he glimmers yonder by the wall.
He bears the head that was so swift to fall
By that back-handed blow.

The head smiles too!
The Borgia's will it was to run him through
Because his wife was soft and weak of will.

As for the poisoned sleepers, how they fill
The earth-floored lean-to—many in their throes.
The Mantuan archbishop, I suppose,
Is he who lies the straightest, Giacomo's—
The protonotary—is the stiffest pose,
Gian the cardinal looks his pained surprise . . .

The sbirro shook his mane, strained limbs to rise,
Sank back—and entered Don Alfonso's room.

High-ceiled, that great apartment in the gloom,
Save for the burning brazier, swarmed with night.
The strangler with the bowstring craves no light
However, and the fixed imperious glance
Of the cloaked Duke precludes one look askance.
Wail of all wails—O wail that rings forever!

Veined eyeballs staring, with a huge endeavor
This Don Michele Coreglia heaved upright.

Lying or sitting, 'tis no better plight,
Even with the palms pressed tight against the eyes.
Ramiro in Cesena square, the cries
Of the rebels in their dungeon, beasts at bay!

Red—as the hands press eyeballs—red as they
Who fell at Capua—is the swimming light.
The shrieking of the nuns upbraids the night . . .

"Yet," groaned this Michelotto, swaying now
Upright, one arm across his streaming brow,
His bare feet shuffling on the earthen floor,
"Yet, thou dark man, I shall not see thee more,
King of these kakodaimons—but a king!
Ah, Cæsar, Satan, sire, if this one thing
Should pass—that thou couldst rise from earth and tell . . .!"

A voice spoke then. A voice said *"Is it well*
To summon weary shadows out of Hell?"

In armor red as blood he stood revealed,
The golden lilies quartered in his shield.
The outstretched hand—oh, grisly strangest thing!—
Flashed with the sapphire cardinalitial ring.
Three-pointed flame licked up from foot to head.

So Michelotto, with the dawn, lay dead.

THERE LIVED A LADY IN MILAN

There lived a lady in Milan
Wrought for a madness unto Man,
A fawn Il Moro could not tame;
Her beauty unbedecked with pearls
More than all Beatrice's girls,
Her eyes a secret subtle flame.

Brocade wherein her body dressed
Was hallowed; flowers her footstep pressed
Suspired incense ere they died.
Her father, mazed with alchemy,
Wrought in his cellar ceaselessly.
She lived in quiet, gentle pride.

And by her garden in his hour
Passed Leonardo, come with power
From Florence. So he saw her face
Bending above the shriveled stalks
Of autumn on the garden walks.
And Leonardo drank her grace.

She was as if a sunset were
With fresher colours, clearer air,
And a more golden coil of cloud.
She was as though all citherns swooned
With one rich harmony, myriad-tuned,
Haunting, enchanting, pure and proud.

And Leonardo said, "Ladye,
I know not what you do to me
Who have and have not, seek nor find.
The sea-shell and the falcon's feather,
Greece and the rock and shifting weather
Have taught me many things of mind.

"My heart has taught me many things,
And so have emperors and kings,
And so have leaves and green May flies;
Yea, I have learned from bird and beast,
From slouching dwarf and ranting priest.
Yet, in the end, how am I wise?

"Though with dividers and a quill
I weave some miracle of will,—
Say, that men fly,—though I design
For peace or war a thousand things
Gaining applause from dukes and kings,—
Though soft and deft my colours shine,

"Though my quick wit breed thunderbolts
I may not loose on all these dolts,
Things they are babes to comprehend,—
Though from the crevice in stone or lime
I trace grave outlines mocking Time,—
I know when I am beaten, Friend!

"Say that there lived of old a saint
Even Leonardo dared not paint,
Even Leonardo dared not draw,—
Too perfect in her breathing prime
For colours to transmit to time
Or quill attempt,—aye, ev'n in awe!

"Say this, cold histories, and say
I looked not on her from this day
Lest, frenzied, I destroy my art.
O golden lily,—how she stands
Listening! Beauty,—ah, your hands,
Your little hands tear out my heart!

"Do you not know you are so fair,
Brighter than springtime in the air?
What says your mirror to your mind?"
"Phantom," she whispered, "do you plead
With ghostly gestures? . . . Ah, indeed,
Pity a lady deaf and blind

Since birth!" . . . Then Leonardo turned
Saluting, though the sunset burned
In nimbus round her,—went his way
In daze, repeating, "God's defect,
Even He!—and masterpiece elect!"
He never saw her from that day.

RENEGADE

With rumbling cannon, rippling pennon and halberds bright
in the sun
On war's way—god Mars' way—the clamorous armies
roam.
Hot destriers shake their manes and ramp at rumor of siege
begun
And high carracque and galleasse swing towering through the
foam.
Venice is out with all her fleets, the Borgia's never slept in
sheets
This long while, this wrong while, this black and villainous
tide,—
But drunk with wine of June to-day, from all Romagna I'm
away.
Up, up through oak and ilex grove to lose the world I
ride.

Put faith in your miséricorde, in parchment, rack or
rope
Or wind your horn beyond the Alps to march against the
Pope,—
God of the sun who made the moon drip golden honey such
nights in June,
What dark hearts, these stark hearts,—how lost, how lost to
hope!

They're staggering brawling through their camps. Their torches splash the stones
With red gleams, with dread gleams, where blood pools deep the mire.
Their captains bellow bawdy songs to drown the dying's groans
And every southern vineyard glints an evil bivouac fire.
Yes, Sforza, dream you hold Milan,—Este, Ferrara, if he can;
Let every tyrant sweat and curse and plot and fume and rage;
Far, far above you toward the moon my gelding climbs this night in June
To find and pluck a golden rose, to clasp an heritage!

O joy that never your whole endeavor of plots and wars could win!
For soft—there—aloft there, through glimmer of falling bloom—
A light that shines through tangled vines, a star the dusk within,
The porch of even, the door to Heaven,—a shepherd's wattled room;
A face for memories, soft dark hair, bright eyes to heal the heart!
(O roar your victories, boast your pomps and grasp your golden prize!)
Here—moonlight lies along the floor. O love, and here thou art,
Sacred and ghostly in the gloom as summer's slow moonrise!

This still night, this strange night, its mystery so deep
That far away the chaos fades, the summoning drums are gone
As still I lie and only hear her breathing in her sleep
While high in heaven the silent stars shine on, shine on, shine on. . . .

A VISIT FROM VASARI

Dark—all is dark and cold! No light is here
Save this the candle in my helmet gives,
The paper helmet of an old, old soldier
Who toiled at trench and earthwork on the heights
Of Florence. . . . It was very long ago.
And now I chip and chisel through the dark,
This sputtering goat-fat taper on my head,
In a cold gloomy house of rats and spiders
Off Trajan's forum.
And my bitter heart,
Like some strange heavy fruit, submits itself
To the grinding pestle and colander of God,
Whence, crushed, bled forth and strained, a thin small wine
Of sacred numbers drips! I gird myself
For heron-patience unto the agony's end.

My Adorata, my sibyl from that isle
Of oleanders, Ischia in the sea,
Where once old Epomeo's mountain-height
Guarded your singing soul! You also bore
The weight of this interminable life,
Suffered, endured, and conquered at the last.

Yes, I am very old. I have known it all;
All!—the great edifice that seems in dreams
To rise divine out of the mind of man

Till its proportions shoulder back the sun,
The ideal grandeur. Ah, so to build, and be
Some conquering Brunelleschi of the soul's
Magnificent cathedral, domed and lanterned
With gold stolen from God! Yet, as she taught,
Comparing Love to an entablature
That we had pored on once amid the ruins:
(While I supplied her terms of architects!)
Passion's the cornice, nobility the frieze,
Humility the architrave whereon
All rests—a strong erect humility . . .
So apse and aisle and nave of the soul's church
Must breathe that spirit, where the last is first.
Humility . . . how fools misunderstand
The slandered term!
A lifetime's span ago
I climbed a spur of Etruscan Apennine
Above Carrara, where we worked the quarries
Like mad for marble. That day I stood and gazed
From the mountains above Carrara across the blue
Ligurian sea. Far down below me wound
A road, with silly miniature white oxen
Hauling their load. The whip-crack of their driver
And his voluble voice were little diminished sounds
Through the still noon. The puffy drifting cloud
Moving along the road seemed hardly more
Than that hidden dust I filliped from my palm
The day I feigned to pare my David's nose
For Soderini.
Blue sky—the sea below!
I stood and thought, what sea-mark might not rise
Immaculate on this mountain? Thus, or thus

Disposed,—why not some glorious Pieta
Eluding schoolmen's definitions? Yes,
The mountain-mother, Nature,—in her lap
The tortured limbs relaxed of breathing Life
Exempt at last from the long agony,
Quieted by this vast mysterious sky
That broods forever over us, and should lend
Its elemental purity and pity
To her deep immortal gaze. I felt the stone
Already flaking from my flying chisel
Seized by a spirit stronger than my own,
As in the days when I despised clay models
And flung myself against some massive block
With fury—what they call my "terribleness."
The Voice of the seaward scarp, I saw it grow
Forth from the stone, an immemorial
Astonishment to all the future's ships
Whose sailors, stricken dumb, should drop the rope,
Forget the sail, and stare, and bow their heads,
Aye, bend their knees—adrift in waking trance!

The moment passed. I shambled down the mountain
Moaning, "Oh, for the eyes of Uriel
To see how all these leaguering ambitions
Of the heart may triumph!" Once more the moment passed.

Why visions—and I have seen them—such as that
Which took me in the garden of my house
In the first year of Leo's rule, one Autumn:
The marvelous three-rayed meteor that I drew
With pen and colours,—one ray turned east and one
O'er Rome, and one toward Florence,—visions, I think,

Are no more strange (though less accountable)
Than these inward dreams that grow and fill the mind
Belittling life to a small mire for flies,
Not men, to buzz about! As proud—such dreams—
As, for one instance, that glorious second sight
Investing the bargaining Bernadone's son,
Saint Francis, when he raised his eyes and saw
A crucified seraph in the Apennine.
Can one not image the feebly thundering wings,
The iridescent glory, the wild heaven-grief,
The torture of those torn celestial limbs,
The grandeur glowing through such clouds of pain!

Dreams, dreams of Florence! Ah, once as I returned
From San Miniato where our falconets
Held off the siege, I marked upon the roof
Of Santa Croce musicians seated playing,
And, on the piazza, two squads of whites and greens
Battling at calcio for the football goal.
Thus light you held disaster, thus you lifted
A laughing face to doom, insurgent people,—
As Niccolo named you,—"vain and childish still,"
Yet with nobility and fortitude
His sad embittered nature might not see.
But blunderers, blunderers! For the Apennine gorges
Had you sent forth but a few thousand men
Instead of lavishing such craven gold
You had turned Bourbon back—who knows?—and saved
The sack of Rome and your own ravishment.

True that France paltered, true that Venice quaked,
Francesco Maria snapped like a broken reed
And Clement swayed to every gust that blew;

The muddle around Milan seemed worse than fate;
Yet, Florence, thou "most beauteous daughter of Rome"
As Dante hailed thee,—Florence, Cæsar's camp,
Where was thy strong hand to save Italy
That hour? Did thy banner not bear the badge
Of a great free people—not a ship of fools?

Rash hope of France—the great betrayal—soon
Overthrow, rapine, sack,—and Florence dead.
There stand the figures in the sacristy
Of San Lorenzo, showing forth my mind.
Who cared for the younger Medici? I carved
Florence the warrior, gazing on her ruin;
Florence the young and somewhat specious knight
Of times of peace, luxurious and weak.
There Day and Night, Twilight and Dawn, display
My various resignation or despair
For her. I hid my grief. I came to Rome,
Never to look upon my Florence more . . .

Was that a knock? This cramp gets in my legs
And I can't move. The dogskin hose beneath
My stockings, and these cordovan leather boots,
Don't aid my sudden shifting either. *So!*
Now another candle. *Hola! I am coming!*
You, Giorgio? Giorgio, Giorgio, is it *you!*
A thousand welcomes, friend! Come in! Come in!
That is good feltro you are clad in, friend;
The weather still is sharp, though hardly yet
The time for malaria from the Pontine marshes.
Still, it is not the clean air of Casentino—
Especially—but I see you in the flesh!
And so you brought the Cardinal to Rome?

Such a cape and tabard—and what riding-boots
Spacious and spurred! Why, yes, of course you came
Just as you are—to see the old man, eh?
Sit down! How did you manage to give the slip?
May I put up your horse? He can munch straw
Beside my chestnut pony. On foot, you say?
Again, sit down! This armchair by the fireplace.
That? Oh, stupidity, I've dropped the candle!
That's my Pieta. No-o, it is not yet finished.

. . . I know—Girolamo's olden Council Hall.
The Duke greatly desires my own opinion?
Well, we'll exchange our models, Giorgio mio.
To-morrow—come in the forenoon—we will ride
To Saint Peter's, and you shall see the wooden one
That my divine, celestial Cavaliere
Has at last prevailed upon my laziness
To finish, and ease, says he, my aching head.
Though there's an outline of the dome I drew
Upon the floor of Saint Paul's—but that, I fear,
Is not so orderly. But look at this,
For example,—here's the cartoon showing the plan . . .

Well then, to-morrow, Giorgio mio! I thank
Your immediate devotion and courtesy
For this kind visit—thus—on both your cheeks.
So you found the old fellow—eh? There's a step down.
You slide the bolt. Good night!

. . . She often came
From Santa Caterina into Rome,
And died within the convent of Sant' Anna . . .
And died—within the convent—here at Rome . . .

So-o! So-o! Well, Messer Cock, don't split your throat
Shrilling of dawn without! The gray mists seep
Through door and window. How my candle pales!

'Tis time to stumble to my iron bed
Up obdurate stairs, up past the Death I painted
That, with his coffin, looms, confronting me . . .

"*Rend thou the veil, Dear Lord! Break thou the wall!*"

AKHENATEN

(*Pharaoh of Egypt; Son of Amenophis the Magnificent*)

In the remotest dusk of history
He saw one God above all gods endure
In the sun of heaven, one strange sublimity,
Source of all living things, one cause and cure—
Not mere effulgence and material heat,
But the indwelling of a paraclete.

The fine green scarabs of his father's reign
Bear graved accounts of festival, oblation,
And ceremony. These the son thought vain
Unless to Aten, Lord of all Creation,
Whose gross, deceitful shade was Amon-Ra.
"Adoring with their wings thy sacred ka

"The birds fly in their haunts; the fishes be
Dazed with the bright profusion of thy beams
Even in the deeps of the green-glimmering sea!"
He sings; and when he died, slain by his dreams,
The plotting priesthood triumphed with their guile
And left his name no trace, and called him vile.

But beneath crescent cliffs there lay a bay
And a small island, where Akhenaten made
A city for the chosen of his day,
Where all should love and no man be afraid

And the many-handed beams touch all, and bless
All equally, and wither wretchedness.

"The Aten my father 'twas who brought me here,
The City of the Horizon this shall be.
O rampart of a million cubits sheer,
Remembrancer, thou, of eternity—
O thou whom no artificer hath known,
Aid me to build! I see in thee alone!"

Ah, then the Theban triad paled and bowed,
And Khnemu doffed the twi-plumed atef crown,
And Nak, the demon-serpent of the cloud,
And the great judge, Osiris, all bowed down;
And Thoth, the ibis-headed giant, turned
Wild eyes and gnashing beak, and Isis burned

With frustrate wrath. Along the haunted road
To the pyramids, along the lonely plain
From Heliopolis' nome, a concourse flowed,
Gods on the gods' highway, wailing in vain
To Harmachis, the sphinx. The burial-ground
Of ancient kings throbbed with mysterious sound.

Processions of images and ghostly boats
And strange shapes striding, with heads of cat and ram
Or jackal-jaws; eyes of each beast that gloats
Widened in panic of one who breathed "I am!";
The snake of the northwind, the barque of Ra,
Drove eastward toward the dark peninsula.

The goat-faced potter of the cataract,
Hawk, ram, and man-faced sphinxes, all fled by
Like refugees from out a city sacked,
A wave of darkness under the dark sky,
A rout of star-mist that far shepherds soon
On lonely hills saw traveling past the moon

In rolling clouds tinged with weird bloody dye
And tossed in monstrous shapes. They seemed to hear
Lowings and hissings and wilder sounds on high,
And darkness fell upon them, and great fear,
And their sheep huddled as at the khamsin's blast
As out of Egypt the gods of Egypt passed.

Yet the Horizon City slowly darkened
To a city of the grave, necropolis
Of even God,—as Akhenaten harkened
Curses and wailings from a black abyss
Of slaughtered lives,—because he put no trust
In spear or chariot or the loud dust

Of marching armies with their emblems flashing
O'er the lapped shields. His empire fell apart,
And Egypt's earthly might; and black waves, dashing
Their tear-floods, roared in caverns of his heart
As some seamed warrior from the east, alone,
Stood with clenched fists, imploring, at the throne:

"O King, O King of Egypt, our great Sun,—
Thy cities fall as birds into the snare!
And thou hast sent us not one word—not one!"
So Palestine besought with curse and prayer,
So Syria's grief and wrath made dark the air.
But Akhenaten brooded in despair

For captured cities near Orontes' mouth,
For provinces by fierce invaders torn,
Despoiled and rent; for vineyards of the south,
Fire-blackened pasturage of wheat and corn,—
For desperate defense and falling wall;
And yet, he prayed, "There is one God for all!"

Prayed—and put by the sword, put by the sword,
And so lay dead. Soon Harmhab took his place,
That doughty captain whom all the folk adored,
Who wrought and fought and won back for his race
Gradual sway. Then Rameses held power
And Egypt's conquest knew its zenith hour

Till, with his death, at length all fell apart,
And hordes from west and east, from south and north,
Made the land strengthless.

So our musings start
On Akhenaten. Lonely he went forth,
Lonely he died; the zealot to the last,
Cast in a mold wherein no king was cast.

The man who saw his God so face to face
All else was shadow in that blinding light;
The man who willed salvation for his race
Through happiness at last, before the night;
One who would fain have built on love alone
The welfare of a kingdom and a throne.

His name they cut from all the monuments,
Outlawed his spirit, raised their gods once more,
Resumed the old desires, the old intents.
Again I see him tread the painted floor

Between the gilded columns, in the cool
Of some high lakeward-looking vestibule.

He murmurs, "Living in Truth"—his title then.
"Living in Truth," and "Aten, I behold!"
A frail pale youth, whose body should have been
Lapped, like his mother's, in sheets of purest gold
Ere it was coffined,—for there a King stepped down
Of old, to doff his crown—and take his crown.

EUGENIE'S SOLITAIRE

In a yellow room
Till past midnight,
A scarf of black lace
Across white hair
And around her face
That, on blue gloom
Or in pale light,
Swims ivory-clear,
She of the fluttering parchment hands
Plays solitaire.

The clock tocks.
Each long black pane
Streams with the rain.
Against the fire
The fire-irons' brass
Glitters like glass,
Or gold, or vain
Desire.
The cards are laid,
The cards are laid
As breaths respire.

White and exact
On green baize
The lady lays

Her cards.
Her hand hovers
To see
What the card covers.
She
Thinks swift small thoughts
Of temper—of tact,—
Quickens her hand
Or retards,
Shifting the ill-planned pattern of the cards.

On each card's back
Is a gold crown
And golden curlicues,
A web design.
The cards shine
Brittle as glass, as she
Lays them down
Like a person paying dues;
King—knave—
(You see?)
A heart—a spade for a grave—
A club for a crown—
A diamond to brave
The rabble, like renown,—
But not to save!
As the eyes smart,
A spade, a heart,
She lays them down.

Red—black,
A Queen—a Jack,

A Heart—a Spade,—
Black—red,
A Club—a Diamond instead!
They are laid.
The light flickers;
The room widens;
The walls fade:

Flaring and blazing chandeliers,
Conversational surf seething beneath the lights.
Ices, spilt wine;
Floors that shine
Like glass; a uniform
With a crinoline, that nears;
Bright eyes, bright lips,—
Bright mockeries, bright nights,
And the golden bees aswarm,—

And the fears, and the fears!

Her hand hovers
To see
What the card covers.
She
Purses her lips to imaginary roses
In Spain again;
Then the thought closes
Like a black box-lid in her mind.
Her eyes swim blind,
As her hand
Quickens its fluttering movement, or retards
That gesture of a sunny, gallant land.

Red—black (And the rain!)
Blood—death, France and Spain!
Erectly now, imperial again
In her midnight dress,
Exact and passionless,
She plays the cards.

CAFÉ TORTONI ('81)

Édouard Manet (solus):

The Rue Guyot . . . how long ago.
Émile! A bock! . . . To old Belot!
That foolish Salon loved him so.
And well I loved him in those days
At the Café Guerbois. Ah, well,
Stevens, Zola, Astruc, Cladel,
Before the Second Empire fell
What theories set our brains ablaze!

Across the board we'd views to spare
On *chiaroscuro* and *plein air*.
Juries were damned. 'Twas rare to swear
At *ateliers*. But then the flame
Of envy that our Emperor nursed,
Fanned by the Hohenzollern, burst
To conflagration doubly cursed.
Across the Rhine the Germans came.

The tap of drum, the clank of sword,—
How soon the Red Republic roared,
When Fabian Trochu dared afford
To shift and gloss and squirm in vain,

While Garibaldi crouched afar
Watching my country's crimson star
Ride o'er the ranks of raving war
With art chained captive in her train!

Then, Monsieur Thiers, you saved the soul
Of France. But fate is very droll.
We few, "École aux Batignolles,"—
Pouf!—like the dust dispersed and fled.
England or Holland, art or fame,
Gentle distaste, or fear of—shame?—
Dissolved us. Mine no martial name,
Though I took arms. Bazille—is dead.

Yet, is such scuffling truly war
Compared with striving for one star
"To be oneself"? Why, then we are
Outcasts, pariahs, what you will.
Of *this* some Mantz shrieks "Patchwork"!—this,
"Grand Art degraded!" How they hiss
When two bright colours meet and kiss!
Who knows but they are hissing still.

And still the independents surged
To victory. The Jury's purged.
Gervex has told me how they urged
More votes, to make my medal sure.
And here I sit as proud and pale
As some David of fairy-tale
In one stiff style grown old and stale.
I pinch myself, but facts endure.

My God, what did the critics know
At first of Courbet or Corot,—
The vital world, the to-and-fro,
Or light, true light? Black death they died.
Their models struck an attitude.
"The proper function of the nude"!
I—I was mad, and I was "crude,"
But it was life for which I cried.

Thank God young art still breathes and dares!
Hail to these younger men from Gleyre's,—
The colored shadows that are theirs
(That violet of my "Pertuiset")
Show—'mid the ancients though they sought her—
How only truth claims art as daughter.
Mark that new Raphael of water,
My multiflowering Claude Monet!

Still they will mock my *jeux d'esprit*,
Cat, parrot, bright green balcony.
My palette takes the higher key
Perforce,—for radiant nature cries
From field and tree and form and face
Of richness hid, of vibrant grace,
Of vivid light; and life I trace
Through all, because I have my eyes.

Where is that furious Pierre Baudelaire,
Swashbuckler with the green-dyed hair?
He loved my Spaniards. "Ah, but rare!"
O'er my Lola I heard him rave,—
In my first "Chanteur Espagnol"

Swift to forecast my chosen goal.
And Émile Zola! Each a soul!
Then life was turbulent, youth was brave.

Under the awnings of Madrid
(No dishes viler 'neath a lid!)
I would that I had longer hid
Though their *cuisine* had furred my mouth.
Some sorcery breathes through Spain, I swear.
But I—am Paris. Why despair?
My boyhood once breathed foreign air . . .
Painting Dutch cheeses . . . sailing South.

The Spanish food . . . what food *is* fit?
I condescend to fathom it.
Now these raw oysters . . . Wait a bit,—
Such *nacre* it is all poets cry,
And once its soul did I evoke,
Still-life that knew my master stroke,
Immortal oysters—tsch!—I choke.
And I have lived to paint them—I!

In the next Salon, something new.
Grant that my cunning bear me through,
I'll hang a Bar-room then! There too
Like glory lurks, if once unfurled.
Let this ataxia cramp my hand,—
Some day, perhaps, they'll understand,
Though *Hors Concours,* that, as I planned,
I left them—well—a living world!

IN THE GALLERY

Fields of Argenteuil,
Where the summer day
Dreams of Claude Monet;

Poplars black and stern,
Grasses where we learn
Vivid poppies burn;

Loveliness repressed,
Reticence and zest
Subtly manifest;

Strength and tenderness
Like the sky's caress,
Shades that heal and bless.

Ah, to gaze and gaze
Where through purest grays
Poppy flamelets blaze,

And black trees that brood
Consummate our mood
To beatitude!

So from frame to frame
Bearing each his name
Back at last I came;

And the elf-like child
From the picture smiled.
Or was I beguiled?

Time shall cast away
Crowns—but you shall stay,
Fields of Argenteuil.

Though his brush could pass
Over trees and grass
Often to surpass,—

Tints of trembling light
Exquisite and bright
Shimmering on the sight,—

Leave me this one thing
For my glorying,
For my hid well-spring;

Fields of Argenteuil,
Where the summer day
Dreams of Claude Monet.

SCHOOLROOM OF POETS

An autumn dusk darkened my window panes.
I saw a jeweled lamp with silver chains
Glow on my wall, the lamp of poetry,
Wreathing me round with mists of memory,
Breathing rich names. And then—a voice it was—
"*Where left you Chrononhotonthologos*
Aldeborontiphoscophornio?"
The battering syllables came tense and low,
Stirring to laughter with their quaint bombast.

And then I saw that I had somehow passed
Into an ancient schoolroom, raftered low
And dusk and dim, save for a firelight glow
Making the walls with grotesque shadows dance.
There, near the fire, some huddled boys by chance
Were tracing pothooks, whispering, mending pens;
And the strange words I heard had come from thence.
The bluecoat boy who spoke them turned his head.
"Digne Mastre Canynge," was the next he said,
"Your arcublastries and your asenglaves
Be wychencref to brayde emmertleynge staves!
The fetive baubles of the song I reap
Toss like emblazoned banners in a keep.
Besprent with comets is my brigandine;
Damoiselle Poesie my daised queen.

Brystowans, kneel! In fiery meteors dight,
With ye, dull Saracens, I join the fight,
Like to King Richard, lyoncelle of war!
Above St. Mary's hangs a blazing star.
This parchment—this—!"

And in the firelit gloom,
As in the Church's ancient charter-room,
The child, large-headed, knelt beside a chest,
Oblivious to the converse of the rest,
Scanning the documents whence he would draw
That work that Walpole set without the law,—
That fifteenth century hoax, that echoes still
Even to the crest of steep Parnassus hill

Quaint elfish knight of Bristol and of London,—
Swordsman of satire Holborn soon saw undone
When want as an armed man stood by your side,—
Midget of genius and imperious pride,
You and your Rowley shine at last enskied!

And then another voice withdrew my gaze
From the child fashioner of archaic lays,—
Another poet? His vivacious eyes
Glittered with dreams. A Latin exercise
Fluttered from off his knee. And then he bent
His tossed brown curls upon his book intent.
Tooke's "Pantheon" or Marmontel's "Peru,"
Which held him breathless there I never knew;
Whether the old Athenians passed him there
Wearing the golden tettix in their hair,
In the broad agora mingling their himations
For arguments, rejoicings, protestations,

Or if, indeed, the alacritous hyaline
Parted to show the god Apollo shine
Bending his ivory bow,—or if, again,
Keats climbed the Andes with Pizarro's men,
Their steel cuirasses glittering through the snows
Where Cuzco's fate would soon be Mexico's
And Atahuallpa's dungeon shine in state
With golden goblets and with golden plate
Piled for his ransom—and his mortal loss
To cruel cavaliers, who bore the Cross.

The room seemed vibrant with great song that calls
The ages slave, as once on Carian walls
Apollo laid his lyre, and all the stones
Resounded in harmonic undertones.
Round that brown head that housed no thoughts of fame
Flickered the bright, authentic, Tullian flame!

I roused at last.
A homely, pock-marked face
With kindly eyes, met mine, as from his place
Young, wise, erratic Goldsmith smiled,—the boy
Whom the old quartermaster near Lissoy
First taught of ghosts, banshees and leprechauns,
(To rival young John's satyrs, nymphs, and fauns),
And stirred with tales of the Allies in Spain,
Of Port Mahon, and Barcelona ta'en,
Of Stanhope at Brihuega lost to hope,
Of freakish Mordaunt, friend of Swift and Pope,—
Battles and heroes, camp and counterscarp,
And, through it all, the sad sweet Irish harp
Keening Cuchullain.

You knew, who knew "the daggers in men's smiles";
Fluting the fops to rustic heydeguys.
Sweet missel-thrush that sang to lowering skies!
You lifted golden landfalls on despair's
Dark sea,—O Lydian touchstone of sweet airs!
Nor you forgot your Ax-yard beggary
When Newberry's counting-house paid forth your fee,—
In purple smallclothes, scarlet roquelaure,
And fine lace neckcloth, standing by the door
To dispense bounty,—and thence merrily
To the "Turk's Head," or to the Thrales for tea,
Where Burke and Reynolds with—not at—you laughed,
And Boswell raged at many a quiet shaft.
"Inopem copia fecit!" ghosts must say
Who mocked your small-talk in their Georgian day.

Here you sat dreaming, whimsical with mirth,
Toasting your toes before the fires of earth!

Then I perceived that in that schoolroom warm
"Brown Silks" sat by "Mad Shelley" on one form,
Their arms entwined, while Shelley, fair and slight,
With gleaming hair and round blue eyes alight,
Told of the dragon in Saint Leonard's wood,
Or of the alchemist none understood
Who lived in Field Place attic.
And the child
Of splendid churchly vision bobbed and smiled,
Shy with his words, but near as elf to elf,
Quoting some bit of Shakespeare to himself
Or Latin tag, with luminous eyes of awe,
As in the dormitories of Ushaw.

So faded that old schoolroom, as its fire
Died, and the shadows gulfed the seats entire;
And, as I woke, sharp on my window-pane
Came the quick rattle of the falling rain.

Better than in their verse, than in their prime,
I love my poets in their seedling time.
What words could match that close and vivid charm,
Young dreamers by the fireside, arm in arm!

COLD TEMPERAMENT

When arguments grew too intense,
His was a master hand to fence,
To say the excruciating thing,
Or pluck the plum, or draw the sting
Of any heavy conversation
With some immortal observation.

They say that he was cold, aloof;
He never had been put to proof
By birth or death, by child or wife;
That he but smiled and strolled through life,
With all its wolfish pain and want,
Too clever and too nonchalant.

Well, he was never in a passion
Of love or protest; but his fashion
Was all too mild (as time enhances)
To draw such very furious glances,
When his smile gleamed, as words abated,
And he said something many hated.

When people took themselves too seriously,
When they emotionalized imperiously,
When their bias seemed too arrant
Or condescension too apparent,
His eyes were sheathed, his fork was shifted,
Only his eyebrows slightly lifted.

The things he said were sometimes odd;
And whether he believed in God
I can't conjecture; and because
His heart was never meat for daws,
I do not know (I know it's frightful)
If he were "sweet" or "so delightful."

He had a way that did not nettle
Some few, but put them on their mettle;
And an unfortunate zeal (decried)
For "looking on the other side."
Some men bring thunder, others balm.
He only had peculiar calm.

He never, to my observation,
Gave of himself a "revelation."
He never did a thing of price
Or made one noble sacrifice.
Yet I have tasted Heaven's wells
Hearing his monosyllables.

V

CITY ENCHANTMENTS

"Granite and steel upflung became my fountains,
Cunningly reared and held as by a spell."

THE SINGING SKYSCRAPERS

This was after midnight.
Thus it befell.
The city that is Heaven,
The city that is Hell,
Blinded by its dazzle
Woke me aware
Of its tall titanic towers
Singing in the air.

From Madison Square
Hidden in the mist
Save for its pharos—
A blaze of amethyst
Swimming in the mist—
The Metropolitan,
Singularly ringing
Through steel and stone,
Softly began
In monotone
The singing:

"To Enoch in the land of Nod I cry,
Æons away,
Forgotten by our day,
But rebuilded in the night,

Every stone,
Spectrally on high
Where cloud drives by
And the moon illumes the gray
Ghosts of cities in the sky
Thickly sown;
Majestic phantom cities
That move above our slumber
Hung aloft in air—
Cities beyond number,
Towers beyond number!"

And over the Avenue
And Broadway, lying still,
The Flatiron Building answered
With every floor athrill:

"Thebes, I invoke thee,—
Tadmor in the Wilderness
Conceived of Solomon,—
Memphis, Alexandria,
Cyprian Paphos
Sacred to Astarte,—
Overthrown, tragical
Blank blue ruins magical
Under the moon!
With sistrum and cymbal
Cozen me a tune
From this night air nimble!"

And from far to the South
I heard the Woolworth Tower
Reply from the sky:

"Aye, cities of power,
Each a granite flower
Stamened to unfold
With towers of ivory,
Towers of gold,
Towers of brass
And towers of iron,
Towers all as many as the hours that environ
The years of our servitude,
Our steel and iron yoke.
In the deep blue skies
They stand like smoke!
Pavia the hundred-towered,
Shining over Italy,
The Greek Heliopolis
The City of the Sun,
Phœnician Sidon,
Persian Persepolis,
The Vale of Siddim's cities
By sins undone!
There the strong rampires
Of Troy flare fires.
There like spears stand spires.
Priceless citadels
Pulsate with their pean
Eon after eon:
'We are the eternal,
Your frames but shells!
We are your sires,
The frozen fierce desires
Of Man made immortal
By temple-miracles!' "

And the Singer Building,
As I seemed to know,
Resound through the town
From its station far below.
It sang of the City of the Violet Crown.
It sang Rome risen and Rome gone down.
It sang like a seraph
Tremendous in the dark;
And the million-windowed Plaza
Up by Central Park
Echoed from afar,
Intoning to a star.

Nineveh they sang,
New York they sang!
In surcoats of stone
Like huge knights at vigil,
Each alone
Sealed with the sigil
Of the glories of the Throne
That wakes this Memnonian
Music eternal
In the clay and the compost,
The steel, the stone.

So above our shining towers
To my eyes was given
A last great vision
Of a wall great and high;
Twelve gates, twelve angels,
And, descending out of heaven,
The Celestial City

Blinding in the sky!
It lay foursquare
To what winds might pass.
Jasper was the wall,
And like clear glass,
Pure gold was that city
Blazing in the air;
And sapphire, chalcedony,
Emerald, sardonyx,
Chrysolite, topaz,
Jacinth and amethyst
Garnished its foundations;
And the wild salvations
Of the risen nations
Made a glory there!

Night flowed away from it.
The River and the Throne
Blinded my eyes.
My heart fell prone.
But my brain was ringing, ringing
With vast anthems from afar,
And the Towers, the Towers were singing
To the Bright and Morning Star!

QUICK LUNCH

I seize a little cardboard slip
On entering, and sight a chair
To hold—if I can steer it there—
On one flat arm, some humorous food.
A good day this for going nude!
The seething street—the stifling glare!
Thick-beaded brow and cheek and lip
Attest it well. I cross the floor,
Slouchingly stand to mix once more
With lunch-time's hasty fellowship,
And scan the sign-board bill-of-fare.

Clerks crunch a roll or two,
Pimpled salesmen spread
Raw mustard on their bread.
Small tradesmen, with a bowl or two
Of milk and crackers floating,
Scan scare-heads black and gloating,
And guttural foreign voices
Dispute 'mid other noises
A dozen fruitless themes . . .
Meanwhile his bow Apollo poises,
Loosing swift-gleaming dreams:

Pellucid peacock-colored ripples
The plangent sunlight strikes along

To shallows where leaf-shadow stipples
The idling, sidling silver ripples
With dust of gold, as down the Tigris
The caliph's boatmen send a song.
I sip cool sherbets winy-clear
And melting on the tongue like snow
In gardens of the grand vizier
Where your lute tinkled, long ago!

"Well, gents, what's yours?"
Swab, swab the marble,—dip the soup,
Sling out the sandwich,—punch!—it's done.
Some delicate dessert allures? . . .
"Pie? . . . Cake? . . . Some crullers, son?" . . .
"*One Com-bo!*" (shouted) . . . To a group
Of seeming gun-men, "Salad? Hey?"
Then, bawled, "Two French fries on the way! . . .
Naw! Make that *one!*"
Clash, clang . . . "One scrambled . . . *make it two!*"
"Here y'are, sir! . . . Ye-es, that's Irish stew!"
Clink, clash, swab . . .
Then a sharp command,
And, starting up, I take in hand
My share of thick white china, holding
Limp bread some limper ham enfolding,
Brown doughnuts, and a liquid less so.
(They call it "coffee." Well, I guess so!)

Pellucid peacock-colored lights
Your eyes have borrowed from the stream.
The jasmine of Arabian nights
Steals round you from the dusk hareem.

Sharper than Haroun's Samsamah,
Sword of the caliph, Love can pierce;
No leopard's black and gold more fierce,
No steed of all Arabia
More swift!—and, as the ezzan floats
Summoning the faithful through the throats
Of your strange cries from the skies,
So have the glances of your eyes
Summoned my soul, Zobiede! . . .
There is no more to sing or say!

What all the wealth of camel-trains
Tinkling across the tawny plains,
The spoils of every Eastern vine
Or dainties snared from either blue,
The sky or sea,—whenas your lute
Falls again faint-toned,—and I pray,
'Mid pyramids of golden fruit,
Pomegranates' scarlet gleaming through,—
With scented wine like bitter brine
On my parched lips unhealed of yours,—
Can only pray my strength endures
To slay my love, Zobiede!

. . . By Heaven, that headline looks like war! . . .
To send him to the chair at dawn . . .
Shoots Two . . . Strange Suicide . . . Before
Fate's fingers reach for me, her pawn,
And *I* pass through the same dark door
Whither all breathing men are drawn,—
Well, let me sip my lethe'd dream,
Hoping things are not what they seem! . . .

Ices of cool translucent green,
Syrops of amber, pungent spice,
Rosy-fleshed melons filled with ice,
Bowls of rich Shiraz, bowls between
Of Kismische,—and yet the least
Dog of a Giaour doth rarer feast,
Since 'twixt us twain, with each new day,
Shines Honor's sword, and points the way!

The sefy takes the antelope—
But not the hooded bird or blind!
Fetters of fealty bind my hope.
The Caliph murders, to be kind!
So sigheth Giafar, the good vizier,
A princedom may not satisfy
Since Haroun's daughter, bending near,
Eclipsed all glories from his sky.
He takes the long road that he must.
He serves one only, dubbed "The Just."
Alas, he can no other way
Than crush his brittle heart of clay
In his hot breast! Zobiede,
There is no more to sing or say!

Brush off the crumbs . . . and now what comes?
A glass of water? Clean? Well, I suppose so.
Who knows so?
Cool, anyway! . . . "Hey there, your check!"
A jar of toothpicks pushed my way,
A pink and puffy female hand

Scraping the nickels I produce
Across her counter (while her neck
Glistens with—"perspiration" say.)
Behind me the screen-door flacks loose.

The high gods hover when they choose.
I made an excellent lunch to-day!

GREEN TURTLES

There they slopped about in a little muddy wet,
Their hind-flippers shoving out a toe-claw slow,—
Dreaming of the estuaries?—trying to forget
The West Indies, the Pacific, or the Gulf of Mexico?
Each horny-crusted carapace had gleam and glow
Of amber, polished agate, bronze or gold; and all together
They nosed along the show-glass disgusted at the weather,
Their flippers curved like scimitars in sheaths of varnished leather,
Their necks a web of wrinkles,—and their spirits low.

"Green' is what they call them, but they are not green;
They are crackled yellow lacquer, fleshy-black, and orange-shelled,—
At least in shades of orange were the ones that I beheld,
My blundering chelonians, that came, the waiter said,
Only from Long Island. (But each searching, waving head
Spoke of deep-sea beaches and of algæ-meals instead!)

Indeed they seemed a marvel, in that "Sea Food" place;
They mesmerized my mind with their thrusting bulk!
And I saw gigantic tortoises swimming round a hulk
Sunk deep off Galapagos; I saw the carapace
Of the tortoise of the legend bear up the weighty mass
Of this world, and the poet in Apollo come to pass
Through a turtle's ribs and plates, till he shook the sunrise gates

With heaven-smiting harmony and song like Hippocras!
And then one turtle "turned turtle" while he sought
An exit through this water that was firm and smooth and
hard,
And no use to struggle at, since one only tumbled flat—
And back through cloudy years blew my startled thought
To days by my memory silver-starred.

. . . . . .

There's a creek near the Susquehanna River
Where the sunbeams dance and quiver
And the mud lies caked and browned and baked,
And the grasses sigh to the summer sky,
And you mark, from the ooze upcraning,
A shiny black head, disdaining
The sky's bright blaze with its haughty gaze
Of an eye like a bead; and soon indeed
The sliders slip from the wet creek-lip,
And then you can note on head and throat
The golden stripes, as the splay-foot wipes
On a reed, and the shell emerges well
Of the tiny knight in his hauberk tight
With his wrinkled flesh like a close black mesh
Of light chain mail, and absurd toy tail.
Oh, red-bellied terrapin the black boys love,
Up I see you heave with a hunch and a shove,
Shoot your neck in its webbed elastic skin
And crane with the hauteur of a mandarin.
Your scarlet plastron is brave to see
When one tilts you over carefully,
But your black-lacquered coat would have graced, I know,
The cabinet of the Magnifico.
And your hose are embroidered with brilliant thread

In stripes of gleaming gold or red.
What if your snappishness shows you bilious,—
You are sublimely supercilious!

My grandmother's house is white
With bright green shutters bowed.
'Tis a delightful, simple sight
To see it from the road!
And if you want some milk and rusk,
Turn down the lane and tap
At the side screen-door, or seek the dusk
Of the parlors, each an ample lap,
From the little pillared porch, that twines
With morning-glory vines.

Once there was a garden bright
Right before her door,
All box-bordered of a height;
Flower-beds many score,
Tan-bark walks that had the smell
Of Heaven and a miracle,
And an arbor-gate as well! . . .
How good she was to one so small
When "Nat," the colored boy, was all
My marvel!—*fit for Fame's green wreath!*
Why, he could whistle through his teeth
And walk upon his pink-palmed hands,—
And earn my Uncle's reprimands!
And once, when I was rather sick,
He brought me turtles from the "Crick,"
Those same red-bellied sliders, only
Oh, so small!—and looking lonely,
I thought . . . I put them in a bowl,

And round they paddled, sick of soul
For their sweet mud—and in the night,
When small-boy eyes were sealed up tight,
They hauled them up and dropped, flip-flop,
From bowl's rim to the table-top,
From table-top to matted floor,
And lounged superbly out the door,
And slid through grasses, proud and slick,
And swaggered back into the "Crick"!
Bubble-throat basker, beaked fly-snapper,
Prim and particular, pert and dapper,—
Cumberland Valley, fail thou never
Of these quaint denizens forever!

. . . . . .

My brain floundered back again.
I heard the waiter say,
Flapping his napkin,—"Fine and fresh, to-day!
Turtle steak—thirty cents! Turtle soup—fifteen!"
I was glad they could not hear.
I felt too mean! . . .

NIGHT-MOTORING

The high moon swinging before,
And the big car swaying,
Lifting the grade with a roar,
Swerving and sliding,
Leaping and purring, and playing
With its insolent power, and checking and drifting and gliding!
The stare and glare of the light that scouted before us
From a lip of curved shadow etched out the detail of the road
Like a white, incandescent river, rippling and fleet, flowing to meet
Our swift tires' muffled and crisping, monotonous chorus—
Halleluiah! the stride that we strode!

The wind whipped our cheeks till all being softened and glowed,
Or flashed with a glacial brilliance, and throbbed in our ears
A steady pulsation surmounting and merging all fears
And cares in some spirit triumph beyond the years.

Things lunged at us out of the night,
Great masses of shadow hurled past;
Yellow eyes down the road blazed bright;
Our horn blew a Gabriel-blast:
With a fillip of dust they were gone.
Our car swayed on.

Trees leaped toward our spectral light,
Every leaf, in its ray, yellow-sere with some leprous blight,
It seemed, every leaf-notch distinct!
Grass flowed past, of a poisonous green,
Further shadows were ebony-inked;
Like a painted canvas scene,
Everything flashed unreal and flat to the eye,
Faked, artificial, and mean.
But in distance, beyond the unreeling white fences,
Where the landscape moved more slowly,
The moon, that absolves and dispenses,
Made all things holy.

The square orange windows of farms
Where dark woodlands stretched slumberous arms,
The surging great hills, vague and proud,
The silvery curdle of cloud—
All composed to a wonderful, soft-hued, visual prayer.
The rich, passionate land lay bare
To the nuptials of fierce white stars; and the hissing wind in
our hair
That started our strained eyes moist with its swift, cold kiss
Taught our swooning and leaping blood of this
Strange, sorrow-begetting bliss,
This heart-rending, ecstatic embrace,
Disembodied, that thrills through the tremulous air of night
Stirring the thought to delirious flight
Into fathomless space.

Corn-shocks, close by, stood out sudden like some weird herd
Of tousled beasts. Like a lion's our greeting purred.
Where the road was mending, each stealthy assassin shadow
Leaped alertly behind its heap of gray cut-stone,
And merged in the dusk of the meadow.

We flew not alone.
By the side of our car its own shadow swayed
And towered in the trees, ran the walls, unafraid
Of the threatened raid from each ambuscade
Of crouching houses or lurking hedges.
Far down the road three ruby lights
Appeared at its edges.
We took the planks of a bridge with a rippling jar;
We whirled to the heights;
And then our car
Plunged through a tunnel
Of purple gloom
Shaking volleys of bloom
From trespassing boughs and bushes, and flung in a last flight
down
To the glow on the sky of the thousand-tentacled town!

THE BARBER-SHOP BEWITCHED

Dapper and deft, six little barbers
Snick-snick together in a neat white row.
Glittering with glass, the bright shop harbors
Six sprawled customers languishing below
The hands that grip and the clippers that clip,
The towels that slap and the razor's scrape;
All the things that shape from nose to nape
A face transfigured, make a mummy glow,
And fashion the features,—yes, the hands, too, and feet,
Into shining beacons on the swarming street!

"Flick!" and "Flack!" the crouched bootblack
Slaps his cloth and plies his brush.
"Snick-snick-snick!" the scissors click.
Then—there falls a sudden hush.
See, the barbers all are staring
And the customers are craning.
Who is this who enters, wearing
Topper, tailcoat, and a paining
Wealth of hair and beard? Disdaining
All the bows each barber tenders,
Lo, he slips his coat, and stands,
With peculiar long white hands,
In a shirt of fearful pattern
Crossed by marvelous suspenders!

His trouser-wrinkles
Are frightful taste.
His dark hair sprinkles
Down to his waist.
His black beard reaches
Near to his knee.
One barber beseeches
Him volubly
(His customer finished)
To have diminished
That tangled cataract capillary.
The stranger nods, but his eyes are wary.
He seats himself,—and, once in the chair, he
Seems to drowse.
And from his brows
The barber lifts a curling lock.
Snip!
It is like an electric shock!
Look at the mirror! Look at the clock!
The plate-glass mirror suddenly ripples
Concave, convex.
The moon-faced clock is whizzing
Its hands around and round.
Like galvanized cripples
The customers perplex
The barbers with their antics.
They writhe and slump and bound.
The shaving mugs are fizzing,—
For the stranger's supple hands,
Emerging from the sheet
That covers him completely,
Are making passes fleetly,

Hypnotic, weird commands
That mock the silly sunlight
From the prosaic street!

The mirror-flanking bottles, blue and red,
Shoot up strange spills and quills that elongate
And suddenly diminish, having fluffed to feathery head.
And madly, at the rate
Of dreams, the barbers all lay on
With flashing razors, shimmering scissors,
While all the chairs rotate
Like demon whizzers.
All daylight actuality is gone!

See! The electrical massage machine
Is burr-rring like a fiend let loose.
The water pours
From basins onto floors,
A shining sluice.
And—what the deuce!—
The white soiled-towel holders
Disgorge long tumbling strips
Of flowering towels, purple, pink, and green,
That trip the feet;
And from unfortunate shoulders
Every tucked sheet
Is whisked,—and foam and lather froths and drips
Whitely across the scene.
And as for hair,—
Hair? It is everywhere!
Black hair, brown hair, blonde hair and red
Sprouts and curls and lengthens
From every head.

Even the bald pate turns beneath the eye
To a capillary jungle, on the sly!

Over the floor,
Full knee-deep now;
Out of the door
Like a wild hay-mow,
The hirsute horror
Engulfs the little shop.
Stop, you devil-stranger!
Good Lord, *stop!*
Hippety-hop
Dance the frantic crew
Of barbers turned to jumping-jacks.
The manicurist, too,
Is shrieking. What avails
"Half-moons" politely scissored,
When this fearful length of nails
(Begotten of that wizard!)
Is fluttering from the fingers
Of her customer, like flails!
And the yellow Dandruff Cure
And the fat Hirsutus bottle
Their golden streams and green
Are playing on the mess!
Black magic, that is sure!
Oh, *won't* somebody throttle
The author of a scene of such distress!

And then the stranger rises
In his weird suspenders,
Still weaving of his fingers,—
And the shop surrenders

To his further moods and tenses.
Hypnotically waving
His digits, he commences
A master-task of shaving.
For, drawing from his pocket
A blade as sharp as scandal,
He fits it to the socket
Of an enormous handle;
And seizes one and other,
And holds them in a vise . . .
As bald as a billiard-ball they leave him in a trice!

Staggering and stumbling
Through that rolling hairy sea,
With acrobatic tumbling
One by one they flee,
Staring eyes and beaded brow,—
Till—the shop is empty now,
But—all's in place again!

And the eye discovers then
A swift and stealthy cat
That was not there before,
Slinking through the door
In a black top-hat!

And the sunlight shimmers. And a passing "cop"
Gawks through the door of a deserted barber-shop.

STREET OF CATS

Close the high-stooped houses stood
In that quiet neighborhood,
Undisturbed by trucks or vans,
Pushcarts with their fruit and pans,
Scavengers with sticks and bags,
Or the junk-man crying, "Rags!"—
No, not even gutter-brats;
But at night it swarmed with cats;
Slinking cats and blinking cats,
Cats to chase and cats to clamber,
(Eyes like topaz, eyes like amber)
Round about each garbage can,
In and out of areas ran;
Scrawny cats, with deep aversion
To the Maltese or the Persian
(Soft and sleek that purr and mew
Where the wealthy avenue
Boasts its brownstone "No-admittance!"
To all ragged stranger kittens.).

Here, as street-lamps sparked and sputtered
Down the cobbled street unguttered,
Shade to glare and glare to shade
Moved the feline promenade,
Brindled, blacker than the Devil,
Toms and tabbies in a revel,

Like familiars known to witches,
Like the mouser brought such riches
To Dick Whittington in history,
Like Egyptian cats of mystery,
Crouching, scampering, stalking, squawling,
Spitting fire or caterwauling,
Licking sores, rampant or sleeping,—
'Faith it set my skin to creeping
As I viewed them, perched on high,
In my window next the sky!

Every window blankly glistened
And the dark street slept, and listened.
Clap-clap-clap: a footfall faint;
Then the Elevated's plaint,
Grinding on the curve afar;
Then a distant surface-car
Jarring past; a "cop's" night-stick
Rapping quickly on the brick.
Meanwhile—cats—in swirling mazes,
Through the harbor-fog's night hazes
That came seeping from the river
Setting dainty dreams ashiver
To the long lugubrious moaning
Of the river craft intoning,—
Cats that overflowed each curbing
With an aimlessness disturbing,
Prowling, yowling; yowling, prowling;
With such grinning and such scowling!
Cat Luculluses that sought
In much refuse, feasts unbought;
Cats that wooed and cats that fought.

O for some black plague of rats
That would rid my street of cats!

They would slither 'twixt your feet,
Coming home along the street.
As you fumbled for your keys
They would stalk by twos and threes
Like fierce bandits at your back,
Wildly whiskered, cloaked in black.
They would haunt the steps thereafter
Spreading scandal, faint with laughter
Of a still, demoniac kind
That was never to my mind.
And their cries, so strangely human,—
Gasping child—heart-broken woman!

So one's dreams (each dawn upbraided)
With gigantic cats paraded;
Cats that walked the moonlit sill
In a pageant never still,
Cats that writhing seemed to rise
From the street and fill the skies
Like a locust-cloud by day,
Like a feline Milky Way,
Where the moon, great puss of space,
With one cloud-paw washed its face,
Licked its lips and grinned again
Down on scampering mice and men!

CRAP KING

Any one 'at hones
Fo' a tas'e uh Heaven,
Li'l tas'e uh Heaven,
Watch me roll-a de bones,
(Come seben, come 'leben!)
Watch me roll-a de bones!

Guess I'se bad! Dat so?
Dat so, sho nuff?
Ah call you-all's bluff.
(Dat's de stuff, dat's de stuff!)
Lak a houn'-dawg take 'm
Whahsoah de flea be,
Jes watch me break 'm!
Speak to muh, Phœbe!
Eee-yah-yah; an' *out* de back do'!
Eight, dat's mah p'int; ah sho is po'!
Say, any one 'at hones
(Natchul fo'm, bones!)
Roll me jes a few,
(Yassuh, you too!)
Jine mah rebel
(Oo! Up jump de debbil!)
In a r'ally rollin',
In a riley rollin',

In a rolly-rollin'
De bo-ones!

Down on de lebbee, sunset soon,
Co'n pone en chicken en de risin' moon!
Heah de Yankees talk; *Noo* Yawk, *Noo* Yawk!
(Not a smile en de city all de miles yuh gotta walk,
No mo' possum, no mo' pones!)
All ah got is de bones,
All ah got is de bones,—
So ef anybody hones
Fo' tuh roll me jes' a li'l, ah kin mek 'm sick.
(Git his bill, Big Dick!)
Yea-ah, wid deseyeah li'l stones
Ah kin skin 'm putty slick.
(On de *re*-boun', bones!)
Nine's mah p'int—ninety days de jedge gave 'm;
An' a fo'—*an'* a five—out de calaboose tuh save 'm.
(Got de baabeh's itch, so de baabeh couldn' shave 'm!)
In a r'ally rollin' de bones.

Hebben's mah desiah, an' de Glohry street;
You-all'll heah de pattah uh de angels' feet
Jes' lak Hell done cotch afiah,—
Ya-as, an' you'll yell Whassamattah?
But befo' de sky-cops scattah
All de folks aroun' 'm
An' de cop commandah yell, "Pinch 'm an' impoun'
'm!"
Why, you'll know it's *Alexandah,*
An' be glad you foun' 'm!
Ah'll be rollin' de bones,
Ah'll be rollin' de bones,

Tossin' 'm de fus time on de Glohry stones.
(Six—it—stays!
Flock o' treys, flock o' treys!)
Ah'll be rollin' 'em for hyahps an' fo deseyeah rings
Wot dey weahs roun' dey haid, deseyeah roreyoley things.
(Nebbah on de money—an' leben fus' time!)
De spots all knows me. *Dah goes yo' dime!*
Ya-ah, de luck'll nebbah lose me;
See dat seben rayfuse me!
Come a-runnin', Mistah Richud,—
Sho! It sutt'nly am a crime
When ah's r'ally rollin', when ah's riley-rollin',
when ah's rolly-rollin'
De bo-ones!

Lashin's er graby an' a chick-en j'int,—
But li'l, li'l Phœbe's mah faveright p'int!
Nebbah had a wife,
Lazy all mah life,
Ah kin play de fiddle, ah kin play de fife,
Ah kin jump Jim Crow, ah kin shuck an' hoe,
Knows all de conjuhs 'at de voodoos know,—
But mos'v all ah hones
To be rollin' de bones,—
To be r'ally rollin'
(Whassat? 'S bleedge tuh stop?)
To be riley rollin'
(Matchyuh, Mistah Cop!)
To be roley-oley-oley-oley-oley-oley-olin',
To be rolly-rollin' de bones . . .
Daah's *so!*

HARLEM

I want to sing Harlem on an ebony flute
While trap-drums ruffle to a crash and blare,
With a clear note
From the sylvan throat
Of a clarinet—of a clarinet!
God and brute, black god and brute,
Grinning, brooding in the murk air,
Moons of flame and suns of jet,
Hurricane joy and dumb despair.
Vermilion, black and peacock-blue,
Pink, plum-purple, zig-zag green,—
I want to sing Harlem with a paint-box, too,
Shaking out color like a tambourine,—
Want a red
Like furious fire;
Want a black
Like midnight mire;
Want a gold
Like golden wire;
Want a silver
Like Heaven entire
And God a-playing at His own front door
On a slide-trombone with a conical bore!

Those buildings lean, those buildings lean,
They sway and shuffle to the streets between!

Fly-drumming drones, and drums make trouble.
(Crushed ruffs, long rolls, single and double!)
Wild with the riot of wood and brass
The blues and the peart high yallers pass
While cow-bell, buzz-rattle, piccolo squeal
Clank and riot through a wild-eyed reel.
Xylophones, bells, and the weird kazoo
Drown the trumpets and the tubas, too,
Drown out the tuba with a field-hand song
Patting juba to a dinner-gong,
And the saxophone sets steel and stone
Jigging into tune with a grinding groan. . . .

Oh, roll Jo'dan, Jo'dan roll!
Swing dat gal—O mah soul!
A-all up and down de whole Creation
Still dreamin' ob de ole plantation;
Young folks play in de sun all day,—
(Possum, pone, an' de cane, an' de cotton!)
Hey, mah rabbit's foot! Ghos's go 'way!
(Good times dah am not fo'gotten!)
Rozzum on de bow! Come seben, come 'leben!
Gwine ter fly
All ober God's hebben!

But I want to sing Harlem. . . .
I want to sing Harlem soft and south,
Her dusky day with a rose in its mouth,
Her noon of the Islands of the Seas,
Her flaunting fruits from the Caribbees
Where palm-leaves wave from stucco walls
And street and square hear mellow calls

And meridian sun is blazing down
On the chalk-white glare of a tropic town.
Orange and bougainvillea red
Flame from scarf and turbaned head,
Purple—paw-paw yellow—vie
From basket-bearers swaying by;
A hot breeze blows,
Tossed water flows
From fountains white in the patios;
Like a flaming bloom each negress goes. . . .
What the Indies dream all Harlem knows.

Yet I want to tell of Harlem as a tale is told
By a bleary wizard moldering-old,
Mumbling his beard to a ruined moon,
Moaning along in a sing-song croon.
For noise and color in a hurricane
Pass to a drip of silvery rain;
The moon spills gold on Harlem River,
The ripples gleam like coins a-quiver;
Burnt on the night in Dahomey bronze
The moon is a god through banyan fronds
A-flutter in ghostly jungle-glades.
Flares and fades
All violence from this moon-filled mere;
Only grief and calm are here. . . .

No! Fetish, charm and exorcism
Float like smoke from a black abysm,
Thicken like smoke from eastward rolled.
Land of Ophir, Land of Gold,
Land of half the earth a-prowl,

Of mottled shield and assegai,
Kraals and jungles dark and foul,
Sluggish rivers half a stye,
Moon-dawn on that Afric night,
(All the country crazed with light)
Darkness breathing deep and dense
Thick with death and pestilence! . . .

Then fades, and flares, and fades once more
That black volcano on a haunted shore
Where writhing shadows wail and sob.
Faint, more faint, the war-drums throb,
Great Zulu Tshaka's war-drums spent
In the gloom of a lost dark continent. . . .

So I want to sing minor, wailing low
And full of all the grief I know,
The grief I know;
Oh, I want to sing Harlem quaint and sad
And full of all the trouble I've had,
The trouble I've had. . . .

But the buildings quiver and dance like mad.
Walls of windows, walls of doors,
Delicatessens, clothing-stores,
Drug-store, pool-room, turn them loose
On the Ringtail, Florida and Beale Street Blues;
Antillean flats take up the dance
In a crack-a-knuckle, crack-a-knuckle shuffling
trance;
They reel,
They roll,
They sway across my soul;

They summon the oboes of the East to come,
The clown brass-band, the Indian drum,
The one-stringed bow, the antelope horn,
The bamboo whistle to wail forlorn,
The weird marimba of Zululand
To shudder and strum beneath my hand!

And I want to sing Harlem. . . .
Oh, I want to sing Harlem wild alive
In Nineteen Hundred Twenty Five;
The Negro City, the dream-book town,
Metropolis of black and brown;
Number-gambling round the clock,
Bones and razors on every block,
Coon-can raging, thirst assuaging,
Egypt-rouged and all-engaging,
Drinking, dancing on till day,
Swarming to church or *cabaret*,
Whirlwind-gay with leopard power,
Rolling eyes in a Holy Ghost shower,
Lazing, laughing 'long the street,
Stepping high, stepping high,
Shaken with the shuffles from head to feet,—
Mansions in the sky!

No, fold your wings, fantastical things!
For I want to sing Harlem. . . .
I want to sing Harlem as a dead man sings
Low in the mould, so low, so low
Only the nails of his coffin know;
Safe and sound, safe and sound,
Shoveled six foot underground,

Locked in the loam for strange rebirth,
Pressed to the breast of his Mammy Earth. . . .

Oh, does she croon, "O dark delight,
O you my panther, proud by night,
My lashing tiger painted bright,
My Paradise Bird, my Mournin' Dove,
Parading, moaning of your love;
O my sun-blind eagle, sailing,
My harp of winds and seas a-wailing,
My groping mole-like slumberous soul,
My awful patience deep in dole,—
O you my quickening, you my birth
Of richest beauty, wildest mirth,
My pulse through whom my whole creation's
Swayed to the breathing of my breast,
Whipped up to the carol of the constellations,
On all my urges nourished best,—
O child of the wild, of the womb of night,
Rest, and dream, my dark delight!"

VI

WILD WEST

"Waving a red serape, the wild vaquero wind
Whooped over sunstruck ranges, the herds of Spring behind."

THE HORSE THIEF

There he moved, cropping the grass at the purple canyon's lip.
His mane was mixed with the moonlight that silvered his snow-white side,
For the moon sailed out of a cloud with the wake of a spectral ship,
I crouched and I crawled on my belly, my lariat coil looped wide.

Dimly and dark the mesas broke on the starry sky.
A pall covered every color of their gorgeous glory at noon.
I smelt the yucca and mesquite, and stifled my heart's quick cry,
And wormed and crawled on my belly to where he moved against the moon!

Some Moorish barb was that mustang's sire. His lines were beyond all wonder.
From the prick of his ears to the flow of his tail he ached in my throat and eyes.
Steel and velvet grace! As the prophet says, God had "clothed his neck with thunder."
Oh, marvelous with the drifting cloud he drifted across the skies!

And then I was near at hand—crouched, and balanced, and cast the coil;
And the moon was smothered in cloud, and the rope through my hands with a rip!
But somehow I gripped and clung, with the blood in my brain aboil,—
With a turn round the rugged tree-stump there on the purple canyon's lip.

Right into the stars he reared aloft, his red eye rolling and raging.
He whirled and sunfished and lashed, and rocked the earth to thunder and flame.
He squealed like a regular devil horse. I was haggard and spent and aging—
Roped clean, but almost storming clear, his fury too fierce to tame.

And I cursed myself for a tenderfoot moon-dazzled to play the part,
But I was doubly desperate then, with the possé pulled out from town,
Or I'd never have tried it. I only knew I must get a mount and a start.
The filly had snapped her foreleg short. I had had to shoot her down.

So there he struggled and strangled, and I snubbed him around the tree.
Nearer, a little nearer—hoofs planted, and lolling tongue—
Till a sudden slack pitched me backward. He reared right on top of me.
Mother of God—that moment! He missed me . . . and up I swung.

Somehow, gone daft completely and clawing a bunch of his mane,
As he stumbled and tripped in the lariat, there I was—up and astride
And cursing for seven counties! And the mustang? *Just insane!*
Crack-bang! went the rope; we cannoned off the tree—then—gods, that ride!

A rocket—that's all, a rocket! I dug with my teeth and nails.
Why we never hit even the high spots (though I hardly remember things,)
But I heard a monstrous booming like a thunder of flapping sails
When he spread—well, *call* me a liar!—when he spread those wings, those wings!

So white that my eyes were blinded, thick-feathered and wide unfurled,
They beat the air into billows. We sailed, and the earth was gone.
Canyon and desert and mesa withered below, with the world.
And then I knew that mustang; for I—was Bellerophon!

Yes, glad as the Greek, and mounted on a horse of the elder gods,
With never a magic bridle or a fountain-mirror nigh!
My chaps and spurs and holster must have looked it? What's the odds?
I'd a leg over lightning and thunder, careering across the sky!

And forever streaming before me, fanning my forehead cool,
Flowed a mane of molten silver; and just before my thighs
(As I gripped his velvet-muscled ribs, while I cursed myself for a fool)
The steady pulse of those pinions—their wonderful fall and rise!

The bandanna I bought in Bowie blew loose and whipped from my neck.
My shirt was stuck to my shoulders and ribboning out behind.
The stars were dancing, wheeling and glancing, dipping with smirk and beck.
The clouds were flowing, dusking and glowing. We rode a roaring wind.

We soared through the silver starlight to knock at the planets' gates.
New shimmering constellations came whirling into our ken.
Red stars and green and golden swung out of the void that waits
For man's great last adventure; the Signs took shape—and then

I knew the lines of that Centaur the moment I saw him come!
The musical-box of the heavens all around us rolled to a tune
That tinkled and chimed and trilled with silver sounds that struck you dumb,
As if some archangel were grinding out the music of the moon.

Melody-drunk on the Milky Way, as we swept and soared hilarious,
Full in our pathway, sudden he stood—the Centaur of the Stars,
Flashing from head and hoofs and breast! I knew him for Sagittarius.
He reared, and bent and drew his bow. He crouched as a boxer spars.

Flung back on his haunches, weird he loomed—then leapt—and the dim void lightened.
Old White Wings shied and swerved aside, and fled from the splendor-shod.
Through a flashing welter of worlds we charged. I knew why my horse was frightened.
He *had* two faces—a dog's and a man's—that Babylonian god!

Also, he followed us real as fear. Ping! went an arrow past.
My broncho buck-jumped, humping high. We plunged . . . I guess that's all!
I lay on the purple canyon's lip, when I opened my eyes at last—
Stiff and sore and my head like a drum, but I broke no bones in the fall.

So you know—and now you may string me up. Such was the way you caught me.
Thank you for letting me tell it straight, though you never could greatly care.
For I took a horse that wasn't mine! . . . But there's one the heavens brought me,
And I'll hang right happy, because I know he is waiting for me up there.

From creamy muzzle to cannon-bone, by God, he's a peerless wonder!
He is steel and velvet and furnace-fire, and death's supremest prize;
And never again shall be roped on earth that neck that is "clothed with thunder" . . .
String me up, Dave! Go dig my grave! *I rode him across the skies!*

JESSE JAMES:

American Myth

A Design in Red and Yellow for a Nickel Library *

Jesse James was a two-gun man,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
Strong-arm chief of an outlaw clan.
(*From Kansas to Illinois!*)
He twirled an old Colt forty-five,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
They never took Jesse James alive.
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)

Jesse James was King of the Wes';
(*Cataracks in the Missouri!*)
He'd a di'mon' heart in his lef' breas';
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
He'd a fire in his heart no hurt could stifle;
(*Thunder, Missouri!*)
Lion eyes an' a Winchester rifle.
(*Missouri, roll down!*)

Jesse James rode a pinto hawse;
Come at night to a water-cawse;

* In the refrain the proper native pronunciation of "Missouri" is, of course, "Mizzoura."

Tetched with the rowel that pinto's flank;
She sprung the torrent from bank to bank.

Jesse rode through a sleepin' town;
Looked the moonlit street both up an' down;
Crack-crack-crack, the street ran flames
An' a great voice cried, "I'm Jesse James!"

Hawse an' afoot they're after Jess!
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
Spurrin' an' spurrin'—but he's gone Wes'.
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
He was ten foot tall when he stood in his boots;
(*Lightnin' light the Missouri!*)
More'n a match fer sich galoots.
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)

Jesse James rode outa the sage;
Roun' the rocks come the swayin' stage;
Straddlin' the road a giant stan's
An' a great voice bellers, "Throw up yer han's!"

Jesse raked in the di'mon' rings,
The big gold watches an' the yuther things;
Jesse divvied 'em then an' thar
With a cryin' child had lost her mar.

The U. S. troopers is after Jess;
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
Their hawses sweat foam, but he's gone Wes';
(*Hear Missouri roar!*)

He was broad as a b'ar, he'd a ches' like a drum,
(*Wind an' rain through Missouri!*)
An' his red hair flamed like Kingdom Come.
(*Missouri down to the sea!*)

Jesse James all alone in the rain
Stopped an' stuck up the Eas'-boun' train;
Swayed through the coaches with horns an' a tail,
Lit out with the bullion an' the registered mail.

Jess made 'em all turn green with fright,
Quakin' in the aisles in the pitch-black night;
An' he give all the bullion to a pore ole tramp
Campin' nigh the cuttin' in the dirt an' damp.

The whole U. S. is after Jess;
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
The son-of-a-gun, if he ain't gone Wes';
(*Missouri to the Sea!*)
He could chaw cold iron an' spit blue flame;
(*Cataracks down the Missouri!*)
He rode on a catamount he'd larned to tame.
(*Hear that Missouri roll!*)

Jesse James rode into a Bank;
Give his pinto a tetch on the flank;
Jumped the teller's window with an awful crash;
Heaved up the safe an' twirled his mustache;

He said, "So long, boys!" He yelped, "So long!
Feelin' porely to-day—I ain't feelin' strong!"
Rode right through the wall agoin' crack-crack-crack,—
Took the safe home to Mother in a gunny-sack.

They're creepin', they're crawlin', they're stalkin' Jess;
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
They's a rumor he's gone much further Wes';
(*Roll, Missouri, roll!*)
They's word of a cayuse hitched to the bars
(*Ruddy clouds on Missouri!*)
Of a golden sunset that busts into stars.
(*Missouri, roll down!*)

Jesse James rode hell fer leather;
He was a hawse an' a man together;
In a cave in a mountain high up in air
He lived with a rattlesnake, a wolf, an' a bear.

Jesse's heart was as sof' as a woman;
Fer guts an' stren'th he was sooper-human;
He could put six shots through a woodpecker's eye
And take in one swaller a gallon o' rye.

They sought him here an' they sought him there,
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
But he strides by night through the ways of the air,
(*Brown Missouri rolls!*)
They say he was took an' they say he is dead;
(*Thunder, Missouri!*)
But he ain't—he's a sunset overhead!
(*Missouri down to the sea!*)

Jesse James was a Hercules.
When he went through the woods he tore up the trees.
When he went on the plains he smoked the groun'
An' the hull lan' shuddered fer miles aroun'.

Jesse James wore a red bandanner
That waved on the breeze like the Star Spangled Banner;
In seven states he cut up dadoes.
He's gone with the buffler an' the desperadoes.

Yes, Jesse James was a two-gun man
(*Roll on, Missouri!*)
The same as when this song began;
(*From Kansas to Illinois!*)
An' when you see a sunset bust into flames
(*Lightnin' light the Missouri!*)
Or a thunderstorm blaze—that's Jesse James!
(*Hear that Missouri roll!*)

DUST OF THE PLAINS

Rails unreeling past the brass gate-bars,
Loud-capped tourists with brown cigars,
Idle chatter and a giggling girl,
And the plains' dust rising whirl on whirl—
Rising and spreading like eagle wings,
Ghostily hosting the redskin kings!

A bed of live coals the sunset sky,
All cherry embers, pulsed on high.
Mesas like giant buffalo
Loomed, like the ghosts of long ago.
And the silver rails reeled out, thinned far
From the *click-a-clacket* of our flying car.

Oglallas, Arapahoes, fighting Utes
Wheeled from the shadow of the buttressed buttes;
Painted Sioux, Cheyennes, Shoshones,
Clinging, swinging from their piebald ponies;
Squaws and tepee-poles trailing by
Through the purple twilight of the flaring sky.

Bears' claws and beads on twisted wires,
Sign of the Seven Council Fires,
War-bonnets dancing, feathered with flame,
Out of the golden dust they came,

Trotting, trotting their ancient trail,
Lo-hallooing their spectral hail:

They that crouched ere our time began,
Smoking the pipe of Powhatan;
Kin of the panther, hawk, and snake:
Birch canoes on the moonlit lake,
Creeping death on the forest path,
Wind of the desert, whirling wrath!

Wild and vigilant, stoic, fierce,
Circling the road of the pioneers;
Spirits of lightning, wind and rain,
And the golden corn of the open plain;
Bronzed hard riders with flying hair,
Lords and gods of the open air!

Out of the dust, the dust of the plain,
In phantom phalanx they rise again;
Far from our cities of stone and glass,
Restless forever their legions pass;
Red Cloud and Black Moon's silent braves
Filling the West like an ocean's waves!

Black stood the mesas against the sky,
Gorges tossed back our clamoring cry.
Back from our track fled the skein of rails,
Binding the distance, bearing the mails,
Winding the world on steely thread,
And "Let me tell you—!" a drummer said.

THE NEGRO COWBOY

or

"Chuck Wagon Sam's" Lament for "Golden River"

I had a hawse named Golden Rivah,
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name;
Ride 'm on de range, you could ride fo' evah,
Ride fo' evah twell de Jedgement came.

Foot was light as a leaf a-fallin',
Haid held high lak a wil' elk deer;
Down in de corral you could heah 'm callin',
Heah 'm callin' when mah step drew neah.

Eye so bright as a quail's a-shinin',
Big, sof', brown, lak an antelope doe;
Whirl aroun' yo knee when de ropes was twinin',
Ropes was twinin' in de round-up show.

Fork 'm, an' you moved lak a cloud a-flowin';
Laigs had springs lak an ol' jack-hare;
Eahs aflickah, an' his nose was knowin',
Nose was knowin' all de smells was theah.

O banjo, banjo, plinka-plinka-plink,
Banjo, strum an' strum!

Tell de boys
How Golden Rivah
Run to Kingdom Come!

Now lak as not you boys all know
Ah rode de herd thoo sun an' snow;
Ah rode de herd one starry night
When all de sky was a-full of light.

Steers was res'less as could be;
Golden Rivah nudge mah knee;
"Dere's boun' to be, onless you heed,"
He says to me, "a big stampede."

An' ah leans an' ah says to Golden Rivah,
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name,
"Come to de wuss, we kin run fo' evah,
Run fo' evah lak a flyin' flame!

"Ah knows you, hawse,—you is young an' willin';
Trus' ol' Sam'll keep you safe an' soun'!"
Den de herd riz up an' all a-started millin',
Started millin', an' dey won't lay down.

Hoof up, pawin',—eve'y horn a-tossin',
Eyeballs rollin' lak de sea is white;
Trot, turn, trot; nevah heed yo bossin';
Good Lawd knowin' what dey smells by night!

Rawhide crackin', we was ridin', ridin',
Herdin', callin',—but it ain't no use.
Heah come thundah thoo de dahk a-stridin'
Heah come lightnin'—an' de herd busts loose.

Ah press mah knee intuh Golden Rivah,
Trottin' all ashivah thoo de pourin' rain:
"Quick now, hawse, you gottah prove yo clevah!"
Dat herd come arumble lak a railroad train!

O *banjo, banjo, plink-a-plunk, plink-a-plunk,*
Banjo, pro-ceed;
Tell de boys how Golden Rivah
Run dat stampede!

We went so fas' ah could not think,
We zipped thoo black lak a bucket o' ink;
De win' was a-blowin' mighty guns;
Dat herd run lak de thundah runs.

Low on de plain a line o' light
Seemed a-growin' on mah sight.
"Good Lawd," ah prayed, "oh, save ouah souls,—
An' please watch out fo' gopher holes!"

An' ah leans an' ah prays to Golden Rivah,
"Golden Rivah, ef you gits us thoo,
Ain't gwine be no bit ner rope fo' evah,
Bridle, saddle, ner no cinch on you!"

Den ah laid so flat I was yankin' leathah;
De rumble o' de herd in de rain was drown';
We flewed lak a comic,—hey! we split de weathah—
Bus' thoo sto'm an' lightnin' inta sight an' soun'

Of a great camp-meetin' 'at was monst'ous scary!
Seed deah feathehs an' deah wah-paint, an' ah heahed
'em cry;

Fo' we jolted to a trot on de Golden Prairie
Whah de Injuns go when de Injuns die!

"O Lawd," ah remahks, "yo' is mis-di-rected,
Reffunce to de folks ah had wished to see!
Askin' you pahdon, dis am onexpected,
Awful onexpected to mah hawse an' me!"

O ban-jo,
High an' low
Ring an' sing an' soun'!
Tell de boys whatall ah know
O' de Happy Huntin' Groun'!

Fo' lak as not you nevah seen
Green lak dem trees an' grass was green;
Ah seed dem Injuns eight foot high
Ride feathehed ponies thoo 'at sky!

Ah seed great herds o' buffalo
Preamble on dose plains below;
A Chief, in feathehs lak a tree,
Says, "How!", an' hol's his han' to me.

Den he casts his eye ovah Golden Rivah
Standin', nose aquivah, with his haid held high,
Snuffin' at de breeze blowin' cool fo' evah,
Cool fo' evah undah shinin' sky.

An' ah knows—ah knows—an' ah leans a-speakin'
To mah hawse 'at whickahs lak he tryin' fo' to say,
"Oh, ah's sorry, Sam!" But ah feels 'm weaken,
Fo'-foot pawin' in de proud ol' way.

So ah flung mah laig offa Golden Rivah;
Ah stood beside 'm whah dat rivah run;
Bright, all bright,—but I's all ashivah,
All am blackness whah ah seen de sun.

Big Chief lep onto Golden Rivah,
(O Golden Rivah it's mah hawse's name!)
Chief drew an arrer fum 's buckskin quivah,
Lined it at de sun in a flight lak flame.

Up along de track o' dat flyin' arrer,
High an' high dey went ridin' in de blue,
Feathehs all afluttah on a trail so narrer,—
Sky cracked lightnin'—an' it let 'em thoo!

O ban-jo,
Sof' an' low!
Banjo, be dumb!
You've tol' de boys
How Golden Rivah
Come to Kingdom Come!

An' lak as not you boys all feel
To lose a hawse 't knowed yo heel,
To lose a hawse 't knowed yo han'
Is trouble hahd to unnerstan'.

Ah foun' mahseff down in de draw,
It felt lak ah had bus' mah jaw;
Ah riz mahseff an' took a stare;
Co'se, wan't no Golden Prairie theah!

. . . Foot as light as a leaf a-fallin',
Haid held high lak a wil' elk deer;
Down in de corral you could heah 'm callin',
Heah 'm callin' when mah step drew neah,—

Listen! Is it him? Is it Golden Rivah?
Golden Rivah was mah hawse's name;
Up an' down de range we would ride fo' evah,
Ride fo' evah—*But de Jedgement came!*

MUSTANG

Chaparral grew you, sagebrush knew you,
Winds and rains of the plains blew through you,
Prick-eared, elk-hoofed, ember-eyeballed,
Mincing mustang, paint-splashed piebald,
Catamount-color or fawn or roan
By brawling foam of the Yellowstone
Under earthquake rock grotesque and high
All colours of flame to the turquoise sky . . .

Mouth of iron in rawhide noose,
Feather in forelock, mane blown loose,
A stripe-faced redskin gripping astride,
Riding as only the Sioux could ride;
Jackrabbit racer, here and gone,
Trotting the *travois* up the dawn,
Wrenching the coulee's wretched grass,
Snaking at night through the spectral pass,
Looping the blue-coats' leaguered force
With the whooping braves of Crazy Horse . . .

Death where the Big Horn lodges lie
And troops show black on a brazen sky;
Death at the river, death on the slope;
The dark wave breaks on the last mad hope,
Through the rat-a-tat-tat the hard hoofs drum
Where the fiend-faced yelling warriors come

In a mustang rush; the flecked foam flies,
Wild eyes glare down into glazing eyes . . .

Foal of the wild and the *mauvaises terres,*
Clamber the lightning's zigzag stair,
On purple thunders that loom with doom
Paw for your pasture and your groom!
Blood dripped brightly, quirt fell hard,
Withers to rump you are rawhide-scarred.
Wild was the sortie, black the camp
Lit by the moon's carved death's-head lamp.
Fierce were the faces, strong the strain
That ranged and wheeled on the open plain . . .

But thunder-cloud dark is the blood-stained west;
Fade to the stars! It is time for rest.

VII

RAREE SHOW

"A conjuror was looking at a large dragon-fly through a magnifying glass, to see how it would pass off for the giant High German highter-flighter; and the proprietor of an aviary was supplying a young blackbird with an artificial comb and wattles of red velvet, to find a customer for him as the great cocky, or olla bird of the desert . . . A mermaid was in process of completion."

—*George Daniel.*

PEOPLE

I was painting dolphins on a silver sea
When a genial, jawful upstart came to me.
"Poof!" he cried, "a rum thing!
I foretell *your* fate.
Give the people something
They'll appreciate!
People want the *vital;* people love the *real;*
Hence, your just requital: you are too ideal.
No one does as you do. Wise they grow—and rich!"

All I crooned was, "Who do? *Who* do *which?*"

While my clarion shattered dawn's resplendent gold,
Hobbled up a tattered grandsire, glum and old;
Cackling, "Lawksadaisy!"
Stood awhile, and spat.
Then he said, "You're crazy!
What's the good of *that?*
People want the *mellow;* people prize the *mild;*
You are just a yellow journal's jaundiced child.
Fervor for the few does. Wiser heads say 'Tut!' "

All I smiled was, "Who does? Who does *what?*"

Where my purple vastures know not days or hours,
In celestial pastures, picking stars for flowers,
Midway through my revel, of his own accord,
Popped a little devil up through heavenly sward.
"Lord! Is this your fashion? How you're wasting time!
People pine for passion mixed with their sublime;
People are romantic; people love to pry . . ."
Then I froze that antic devil with my eye.
Then I pounced upon him. Then I hurled him high,
Crimsonly careering down the whirling sky,
Sputtering, "You—you—you will hear from me again!"

"Whoo-oop!" I bellowed. "*Who* will? *Who* will? *WHEN?*"

HOW TO CATCH UNICORNS

Its cloven hoofprint on the sand
Will lead you—where?
Into a phantasmagoric land—
Beware!

There all the bright streams run up-hill.
The birds on every tree are still.
But from stocks and stones clear voices come
That should be dumb.

If you have taken along a net,
A noose, a prod,
You'll be waiting in the forest yet . .
Nid-nod!

In a virgin's lap the beast slept sound,
They say . . . but I—but I—
I think (*Is any one around?*)
That's just a lie!

If you have taken a musketoon
To flinders 'twill flash 'neath the wizard moon.
So *I* should take browned batter-cake,
Hot-buttered inside, like foam to flake.

And I should take an easy heart
And a whimsical face,
And a tied-up lunch of sandwich and tart,
And spread a cloth in the open chace.

And then I should pretend to snore.

And I'd hear a snort, and I'd hear a roar,
The wind of a mane and a tail, and four
Wild hoofs prancing the forest floor.

And I'd open my eyes on a flashing horn—
And see the Unicorn!

Paladins fierce and virgins sweet . . .
But he's never had anything to eat!
Knights have tramped in their iron-mong'ry . . .
But nobody thought—that's all!—he's *hungry!*

ADDENDUM

Really hungry! Good Lord deliver us,
The Unicorn is not *carnivorous!*

THE HAPPY FOOL

I would not be a dogmatist,
Banging a heavy, hairy fist
To crack the pint-pots on the table;
But I would dream, as I am able,
And noose God's wonders in a twist
Of droll thought and of rippled rhyme;
By some strange turn of fortunate phrase
Would capture Faith and teach old Time
To mend his ways.

I have heard out the burning boys,
And now they tire me with their noise.
Where there's intense belief, why scoff it?
But rare's the code and rare's the prophet
With the elect, authentic voice;
And all can rattle iron-ware
Or fling a torch, Salmoneus-like,
Crying, "It thunders—lightens!" ere
Real lightnings strike.

They premise and they start to prove;
And then you're in another groove
As narrow as the one disputed
Another moiety fitly suited;
But all the world? all men approve

The selfsame set of able rules?
I've yet to see them. So, for me,
Dreams and vast wonderment; a fool's
Wisdom, maybe.

THE BIRD FANCIER

Overhead a bleak and sinful sky
Muttered with thunder; and thick and rolling
In from the bay the fog came billowing,
Blurring out outlines, yellowing
Pave and front, to deep vague bells tolling;
And still that shop drew the Stranger's eye!

Each sagging house, a crouched suspect, eyes him;
But the window he peers at, like a spectrum
Flashed full on one, or a sudden plectrum
Plucked across strong chords—how its panes enveigle!
Its smeared, bleared panes! Each dares—defies him;
For, within? 'Tis alive, to enchant and surprise him
With cockatoo, oriole, owl and eagle!

And more marvelous birds, all in gorgeous feather,
Snap eyes, stretch necks, ruffle wings and preen them,
Giddy before him, on swings, in cages.
Days of the Sultans! Days of the Mages!
Who before in such array has seen them,
Or where before? How they ruffle and lurch
And swing and cock on each swaying perch
And peck and yawn golden beaks and stare
Like viziers, like rajahs imprisoned there
Of their haughty lineage well aware!

He chills to the fog. He stamps and shuffles.
The sound strikes through, and each proud bird ruffles—
Startled, inquiring, perchance conspiring—
  Each inky bead of an eye upon him,
  Ready to flock to, attack or shun him.
He stamps again. At their backs a curtain
  Of crimson moves. Does a gray face show
  In just a glance of disturbance so?
A wizened face? Well—he is not certain!

Beyond all cause perturbed he stepped away.
Straight a last glimmer from the smothered day
  Badged in raw gold that nameplate on the door.
  Nearer he craned, forward he stepped, and more;
And knocked, even while his pulses said him nay.

A thing to remark at least, as that door swung slowly,
  Silently inward. On such a view it gave!
  Out of the street as out of a moldering grave—
Into a chamber enchanted, bedizened wholly
  With birds, birds, birds! From the ceiling they sang and swung.
  Cages on cages, a clutter of cages hung
So crowded upon the walls they seemed wrought of wings,
  Shimmering colour, gilt wires, and crests and breasts
Of sleek iridescence—close-woofed of all fluttering things.

And his host before him; a vivid body
  (Striped waistcoat, blue tail-coat, black skull-cap!)
Surely spirited forth from some antique cuddy
  Of Time's lumbered store-room; a quaint, brisk chap,
His tight black breeches bursting their stitches:
  "Eh? Pray you be seated! I heard your rap.

Just in time for a ra-are bird, sir, you are:
A grass-green Surinam jacamar!"

Carmine, maroon, turquoise, orange, yellow:
Such variegation as rustled around him
Ached on his eyes, came to quite confound him!
He reeled to a chair. Curse that bent old fellow
With eyes so brilliant and strange he thought them
Topaz! A Mogul might have brought them
In his high-swung howdah from some Orient court;
Gouged them into the yellow old skull for sport!
And this cheeping, chattering, chirping, flustering
Of birds—here, there, all about him clustering . . . !

Over a cage of brassy wires
The Fancier bent in a mothering way.
The Stranger stared in a golden daze . . .
Trilling and caroling wrought a haze
Of faint, far strumming, of phantom strings
In the dream-thralled courts of ancient kings—
Fabulous realms of an elder day—

Sung at sunset
In lost Cockagne,
Rung through Yvetot
Like bells in the rain,
Through the trees of Yvetot
Leafless, bare,—
Melody lingering,
Ringing in the air! . . .

"Well, here's a flamingo" (he heard the Fancier)
"Direct from a Patagonian river!"

A scarlet neck coiled around in answer;
  Two humorous bird eyes made him shiver.
  They winked at him with no fear whatever
And the wide bill split in an eerie—smile?
  A cold hand closed on the Stranger's liver.
He shook to a sense of impending guile!

Why, the shop was—queer; but—bosh! He was drowsy!
  With a cough he straightened and stared at the ceiling.
A canary—chuckled? A bullfinch frowsy,
  Like a coy girl over her muff, (revealing
  What?) looked away. The room *had* changed feeling!
Something lurked and entrenched itself—here—yon—there;
  In each cage, on each perch, sensed double-dealing;
    A poise of mystery in the air!

And here once more the Fancier hobbled
  With a green-glossed, goggling, glaring treasure.
It shook its crest, it strutted, gobbled,
  Eyed the Stranger—aye, seemed to take his measure!
And—he felt a sudden and frightful seizure,
  For out of the tail of his eye he saw
At the back of the shop emerge with leisure,
  Sudden-from-nowhere—a bird of Awe!

From the jacamar shuttled his gaze, rose owl-like
  To this further wonder, as nearer came
The cassowary, approaching fowl-like.
  But fowl-like he thought it only in name!
He felt his pulses shorten and thicken,
He felt his loud heart-beats press and quicken,
As it stalked him, like some colossal chicken—
  A tufted chicken—yet not the same!

Then a screech-owl screeched from some cock-loft hidden,
A macaw flapped down at his ear to tweak,
And a gold-breasted trumpeter squawked unbidden
His battle-call through a gaping beak!
An ostrich loomed forth in his scaly gaiters,
Three jackdaws grinned from the wall like satyrs.
The Stranger's gaze flamed with suns and craters,—
A spoonbill's spatula chilled his cheek!

Then his eyesight cleared, and his host (as josses
Might smile on their slaves) rubbed his hands with glee:
"For I wished to remark that albatrosses
Go fast this season. We've left but three—"
"Not so fast! Not so fast!" cried the paling Stranger
As he leapt to his feet all alive to danger.
But the Fancier leered like a money-changer
And gripped him. "You'll buy one, and you'll pay *me!*"

His topaz eyes glared. Did he fluff bedizened?
His long nose sharpened. He cocked his head.
Like awls those eyes bored their prey imprisoned,
To sunbursts they grew as the moment sped,
Till doubt no longer the fact dissembled:
On the Fancier's arms the feathers assembled!
The Stranger trembled and looked and trembled . . .
His fight to the door took a year of dread.

. . . . . .

The sky hung grayer. Bleak rain was falling.
Fog eddied on through that shale-gray mews.
Weak stumbled the Stranger from thought appalling.
The cobbles stuttered beneath his shoes.

Down backstreets squalid and dark and narrow
His eyes swam colour, he shook to the marrow!
He shied and ran from a hopping sparrow
Through a feathery storm of unholy hues!

BAST

She had green eyes, that excellent seer,
And little peaks to either ear.
She sat there, and I sat here.

She spoke of Egypt, and a white
Temple, against enormous night.

She smiled with clicking teeth and said
That the dead were never dead;

Said old emperors hung like bats
In barns at night, or ran like rats—
But empresses came back as cats!

MENAGERIE

One is a beaver with a wrinkled nose,
One is a weasel,—and I do declare
I see a melancholy small ant-bear,
Curled furriness that snuffles at its toes!
The wombat is both sleepy and morose,
The Bengal tiger-cub has such a stare
Of topaz! Two white lemmings sit at prayer
With proper paws, superior to foes.

The taxidermist with scissors at his waist
Enters my heart and says, before them all,
(But then he always waves a silver charm.)
"*They should be stuffed!*" I eye him with distaste.
My sins are so bright-eyed and warm and small,
The little animals that mean no harm!

TWO FABULISTS

I. *Maundeville*

We're off across the hills to-day with merriment agog,
With pipe and timbrel ribboned gay, with fiddle-scrape and clog.
Then, Nolly Goldsmith, here's to thee; send Villon's soul no ill;
But all hail that Prince of Vagabonds, Sir John Maundeville!

Oh, Sir John Maundeville, Sir John Maundeville,—
Æneas Sylvius, go up, and, Hakluyt, rest you still!
Cathay, Damascus, Lamary and Persia shall fulfill
The magic of the legends of Sir John Maundeville!

Come, hydra from the Lernean slough; Promethean vulture, come!
The charms that we have learned for you shall strike your terrors dumb.
The ghost of Raleigh gapes askance; he takes our mirth so ill;
But Pliny louts his bonnet to Sir John Maundeville.

Oh, Sir John Maundeville, Sir John Maundeville,—
Of Noah's Ark and Hills of Gold he'll spin you yarns until
The Chan of rich Cathay's your slave and Caffolos is shrill
Singing the lofty praises of Sir John Maundeville.

We know the wild chimeric herds—Aspis, Leviathan,
And all the fabled beasts and birds were since the world began;
The Solan Geese flop from their trees; yon crawls the Cuckodrill,—
And all because we read about Sir John Maundeville.

Oh, Sir John Maundeville, Sir John Maundeville,
From Malabar to Tartary they marvel at you still;
Old Aldrovandus drops a tear in envy fit to kill
Because we sing in unison—Sir John Maundeville!

We're off across the hills to-day with merriment agog,
With pipe and timbrel ribboned gay, with fiddle-scrape and clog;
And in our pack we'll bring you back (at least we swear we will!)
Mad tales and lays your ghost shall praise, Sir John Maundeville.

Oh, Sir John Maundeville, Sir John Maundeville,
The world that gaped at romance then shall gape at romance still;
There's portent in the Autumn leaf, Vale Parlous o'er the hill,—
And our jolly dreamland captain is Sir John Maundeville!

II. *Munchausen*

The snug little room with its brazier fire aglow,
And Piet and Sachs and Vroom, in the very long ago,
Oh, the *very* long ago, with their pipes and hollands seen;
And on the wall the man of war and firelight on the screen.

Their flowered bulging waistcoats that wrinkle when they
chuckle;
The Baron big mustachio'd, gay with star and buckle,
Bristling in a uniform as scarlet as his cheeks,
Choker lace beneath his chin, and splendid yellow breeks.

Smoke eddies blue; and bluer through that window, all abreeze,
Are glinting sky, glistening sea beyond the Holland quays;
Tiles of blue and bricks of red and sunset's oriflamme,
Caps of white and cheeks of rose,—the girls of Amsterdam!

. . . . . .

"When I had sown the Turkey-beans that laddered to the
moon,
And lifted all Westminster in the sling from my balloon,
(Swung over the Atlantic, they craned from windows—
frantic!)
When, eagle-back, I'd scanned the Pole in broad, eternal noon,

"In Queen Mab's chariot I ventured on the sea;
'Twas like a mammoth hazel-nut, with matchless orrery
Asparkle on its ceiling; with planet systems wheeling
And giddy comets sizzling all about the head of me.

"The nine bulls drew it, as stout as those of Crete,
And all were shod with horrid skulls that clattered on their
feet;
Rich banners waved behind 'em, while on their heads, to
mind 'em,
Postillion crickets chirruped them, all chirping loud and
sweet.

"Ghost of the Cape I warn you of, for he is bottle-blue;
We split his Table Mountain; he gibbered and he flew;
The bulls displayed disfeature with gazing on the creature,
Stampeding in their harness when I gave the view-halloo.

"Though wrecked on Egypt's obelisks, disaster I defied,
And harnessed Sphinx, the Emperor's gift, to tow an Ark as wide
As great Westminster; with beau and belle and spinster
And cleric, clerk and coronet all tête-à-tête inside.

" 'Good folk I sail for Africa!' cried I to all my train.
'When bold Munchausen leads you forth, what laggard dare remain
In slippered ease, uncaring to share my deeds of daring?'
Their cheers amazed my modesty and more had made me vain.

" 'The Sultan's bees I've shepherded; I've hornpiped at Marseilles
Where gulped me down well-nigh to drown the liveliest of whales.
I'm riskiest of riskers, but, blow my grizzled whiskers,'
I cried, 'may jackals gnaw my bones, if now Munchausen fails!'

"By night the lions roared at us, by day the simoons came
And swept across our caravan in sandy clouds of flame;
But naught dismayed our temper, or the genial Afric emperor
Had missed our handsome greeting, to his long-abiding shame.

"The people of the Mountains of the Moon I wined and dined;
I reigned at Gristariska when His Majesty declined;
Reforms I wrought untiring, with Gog and Magog squiring,
And Frosticos, my bosom-friend, who lent a legal mind.

"For last superb achievement (Bright tears may Envy shed!)
I built a bridge, from Africa to distant England spread;
No edifice of fable,—nay, not the Tower of Babel
Surpassed its mammoth glory in the heavens overhead.

"So back across its noble arch my retinue and I
Advanced with blaring trumpets through the regions of the sky;
Clouds lingered to enwreathe us, earth's kingdoms far beneath us,
And martial music cheered our march from all the birds that fly."

. . . . . .

The snug little room with its brazier fire aglow;
And Piet and Sachs and Vroom—all sleeping—long ago,
Oh, so very long ago,—and, chuckling in his sleeve,
Still to the slumbering table drone-droning on his fable,
The marvelous Munchausen, with the stories *I* believe!

WHEN THE CATERER SANG OF HIS WEDDING

To a crumbly wine-tanged writhing of macaroons,
A tarantella of dwarf green anchovies,
The rainbow-bubbled surf of claret seas
Under delicate confectionary moons,
Where aspic islands quivered with white whipped cream,
Flung high the dancing dream.

Fluttering round brown quails with crispèd skin
And gilt-foiled bottles aslant in glittering ice,
Florentine gravies, sauces bold with spice,
Scrolled rolls—all conscious courses suave as sin—
Came the white breeze of napkin seeking chin,
The undermunch, so flattering and so scorning,
And a hint of phantasmagorias to begin
In the very early morning!

The tart black-jellied beads of caviare,
White sleek asparagus in mayonnaise,
Stuffed peppers stifled from their natural blaze
By celery chips; striped trout with sauce tartare;
Brindled potatoes to make the palate burn,
Olives and almonds salted crisp and thin,
Black coffee coifed with neufchâtel—a djinn
Risen from the silver urn—

In animate masque these jigged upon a frieze
Where golden pheasants mixed with sky-blue trees,
Then vanished. Terrace by terrace, upward sprang
White as bright frost, that palace of glamouries
Built to the wild and golden god Meringue.
Perilous carven sweetness brittly built,
With curlicued devices pink and gilt,—
Wizarded mist such as the moon doth make!
On solider foundation fitly planted
Where now a gleaming knife descended, slanted,
And portioned melting slabs of angel cake. . . .

Thus, on an evening when his moon was blue,
Since Ermintrude had kissed him in the dark,
The caterer sang the greatest things he knew,
Dancing round Rockbridge Park!

GIRAFFES

It is hard to find them, a shimmer among the mimosas,
In the hot lands, through the tall trees;
As they crane and stand
They blend with the land;
One doubts one sees
Such queer contours browse high among the mimosas,
Branching like trees.

Once there was one that stalked through bell-towered
Florence
While the rich-robed crowd exclaimed aloud;
Once in the glaring Roman amphitheatre
Beasts like these
Stood tall as trees;
Still are they half a myth in their gaunt, ungainly
Pose of pride
Patterned and pied;
Their turning gaze is an old interrogation
That irks our ease.

There is queer mirth in the horns,
In the eye swerving,
Black as sloe,—
In the deer's ears,
In the long tongue's flicker,

In the steep neck's curving;
There are queer fears
At this arch initial of some erased design
Walking your world and mine.

Here is a hieroglyph, an untoward beauty
Mixed with a laughter of line,
A sudden shock
Of gorgeous fancy parading wastes of sand,—
A barren land
With this grotesque familiar seeming to mock
Our solemn scene,
Our careful green,
Our pastoral, our sunset by the clock.

They sport, they breed, they ramble and they amble
In mottled groves
With their mottled loves;
Start at the rifle, scramble
With flying hooves
Frantic from danger; sudden they stumble, dying,
Lopped by the stroke of death,
To the yellow sand beneath;
Adrift, their strange white skeletons are lying
Stripped by the simoon's teeth.

In the mind it is hard to find them, as in the vision;
Here and there
In the fetid air
Of dreary wired enclosures they mark misprision
With an alien stare,
Balancing boredom against monotony,

Diurnally,
Eternally,
Accepting the life we bear.

But we who sometimes glance their way and wonder
For a little while
And gape or smile,
Do not truly believe; if we saw them plowing,
Slanting and high, against the sky,
If we saw them stalking the streets, but not in the circus,
Hauling loads
On our travelled roads,
We should laugh at first, and then their tawdried glory
Would only guide our goads.

It is hard to understand, too hard to measure
This wastefulness by our worthiness.
This whim of design, the inexplicable pleasure
Wrought by what we affirm the "meaningless."
Spectacular? But then our aim is other,—
Oh, quite! These fancies troublingly retard . .
Why should Creation bother . . . ?
But the hieroglyph's too hard!

METAMORPHOSIS—NOT IN OVID

To think behind a bib or in a crib
May lurk some modernized Sennacherib!

Awed saucer eyes and bland uncertain smile,
Will they gull thousands in a little while?

That imperturbable art of blowing bubbles
To stoop to diagnosing liver troubles!

That twinkling candor and artless lurching gait,
Lost, lost in ministerial robes of state!

O solemn babies, so absurd and antic,
My silent apprehension drives me frantic.

Away with horoscope and astrolabe!
I shall not read the stars for any babe.

Yet—laureled Cæsar, in short dress and socks,
Sits, fatly chuckling, toppling building-blocks.

Kings, dustmen, clowns, Napoleon, Scaramouche,
Chew cap-strings from each blanketed barouche.

Through their contemplative fixed scrutiny
The world's weird unknown future winks at me.

THE FOREIGN SAILOR

This is what I heard from a foreign sailor,
A foreign sailor looking out to sea,
Sitting on a string-piece where the wharves were crowded,
Crowded with the cargoes of an hundred lands.
Golden were his earrings, and his eyes were clouded,
Clouded with the memories he shared with me.
This is what I heard from a foreign sailor
Whispering, and gesturing with lean, dark hands.

"Beirut and Alexandria, Port Said and Zanzibar;
The Straits of Bonifacio stretch dim behind and far;
Across the blue Tyrrhenian Sea, Messina's Straits will make
you free,
With spices heavy-laden,
Of the glaring Gulf of Aden,
Of Hongkong, or Tokio, or wheresoe'er you'd be!

"With amber and tobacco bars according to your needs,
Bright calico for petticoats, or gaudy-colored beads,
Adown the coast of Senegal (if you are bound to see it all),
I know the nights and days of it,
Can show you all the ways of it
By sunrise and moonrise and tides that rise and fall.

"This is a land called Africa, a land that I have seen,
Palavering with black alkaids, with kafir and bushreen,

Where striped hyenas laugh at dark, haunting the land of
Mungo Park,
And the sun's as hot as Tophet,
And Mohammed is their prophet
In slave-marts and villages with houses built of bark . . .

"But I was born in far Cathay when this bright world was
new,
In the kingdom Kesmacoran, in the city Kanbalu;
Red sandalwood we traded thence, white Abyssinian frankin-
cense,
Camelopards from overseas
And Madagascar ambergris
And roc's eggs and ivory, amid the Tartar tents.

"And how they hunt the foxes and the martens from a sledge
In the region of great darkness at the world's remotest edge
I know, and how they meet the rains and snow on gloomy
Scythian plains;
Their yelling hordes have led me,
Their mares'-milk often fed me,
In strange dreams—in true dreams—in legend-rich domains!

"Beirut and Alexandria, Port Said and Zanzibar!
Oh, at those names the centuries slip dim behind and far,
And through this sunset's gaudy gleams, what seems is true—
the truth but seems!
So lay your world's embargo
On my mind's fantastic cargo,—
While seas run and ships ply, our life's the stuff of dreams!"

That was what I heard from a foreign sailor,
A foreign sailor looking out to sea,

Loafing by a bollard where the quays were crowded,
Crowded with the cargoes of an hundred lands.
Brilliant was the scarf he wore. His eyes were clouded,
Clouded with the memories he gave to me.
That was what I heard from a foreign sailor
Whispering, and gesturing with lean, dark hands.

MID-OCEAN

Leaning on the rail, looking at the lead,
There was blue water under us, astern and ahead,
A million miles behind us and a million miles before
Water blue as indigo, that never knew a shore!

Where was the skyline, that shining silver thread?
Blue with blue was blended. Sea and sky were wed.
Pulsing through that blue abyss Time and Thought were dead.
Steam? We buzzed suspended in Infinity instead.

Throbbed the silly engines. Joked the silly crew.
"Sails," with palm and needle, swore—as sailors do.
"Chips" said, "Well, we've crossed it! We're coastin' down
the hill!"
Liar! In that azure vault we hung stock-still.

Never was I so at peace, never so afraid.
Like the timeless time it was before the world was made.
Blue oblivion, largely lit, smiled and smiled at me,—
Atom in the void, on the Western Sea!

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Trumpets. Enter a King, in the sunset glare.
He sits in an antique chair. He fingers an antique ring.
The heavy cloak on his back is gold and black.

The hall is tall with gloom. A window stands
Full of scarlet sky. The hands of trees entreat the room,
Plucking and plucking the pane. An oblong stain

Of scarlet is flat on the floor. The projected flare
Slants to the foot of the chair. The chamber's farther door
Slowly advances its edge. A smoky wedge

Of thick blue mist, growing wider as the door swings
Noiseless, twitches the king's hands. He is crouched like a spider.
His eyes are green as glass. Shudderings pass

That shrink him deep in his cloak. The door is wide.
The doorway, from side to side, is packed with mist like smoke.
The dreadful scarlet dies from the windowed skies.

Silence crosses the room. Nothing more.
Silence crowds from the door, gathers, gathers in gloom.
His fluttering fingers rise to cover his eyes.

Silence says nothing at all. It is thickly pressed,
Like a multitude obsessed with terror, from wall to wall.
Silence, deep with dread, is the weight of lead

That slowly constricts his breast. Fingers fight
At the throat, in fierce despite of death, as the drowned resist
Green gulfs that roar and ring. . . .

Exit the King.

SONG OF A CHINESE PRINCESS

Ah, mulberry tree, pretty friend, how happy am I!
O willow, willow, weep not! O butterfly
In your brilliant brocade, what wonder you flutter and fly
Dizzily twirling into the beautiful sky!
Winter is always rain, and foresters binding
Their firewood faggots; winds that are cruel and blinding;
But Spring brings his porcelain whistle and bamboo flute
And sits making merry music where all the grasses were mute.

In my father's shooting park the soft-nosed deer
Are all afrolic. Fuzzy horns—so funny!—
As soft as velvet have just begun to appear
On the little ones' heads. I shall hang paper money
On the mulberry tree, and strew many-coloured beans
Around its roots—and then—will you tell me what it means,
Most Honorable Sir Mulberry? Will you tell me why
I am so happy to-day? Oh, so happy, so happy, am I!

The Filial doves are cooing very sweetly
All through the oaks. At night, the Rabbit-Net
Is such a jeweled constellation set
Beyond my window, its beauty charms me completely
When the egrets are flying across the cloudy moon.
O soon he will come; I am sure he will come soon,
My excellent Prince, on a pony silver-shod,
With sun-patterns on his sleeves and the sash of a mountain-god!

And I shall show him the stack-yard greenbeaks pecking
And he will sit at a table of split bamboo
And eat lychee-nuts and ginger and drink pink tea,
And feed the deer in the park wild celery
And count the carp; and he will say to me,
"You are my little barbel taken in a wicker net
And your eyes are like the dew on the violet
And your hands are like white sea-shells on the beach!"
O how very happy we'll be,
My lordly Lover . . . That will be pleasant speech!

APES IN AVERNUS

. . . And, after these, went by in that sad train
As it were antics or mimes or drolls of Spain.
Each twitched a leash clutched by a creature least
Of all things bold, a little shambling beast
With small wise whiskered face and mournful eyes.
These also I saw mount toward Paradise
In motley, as though it were a long incline
They traveled up through Alp or Apennine.
Swiftly they journeyed, dwindling to the eye,
Till, stamped in black upon the yellow sky,
They tracked a ridge of cloud.
My soul remembered,
Long after that day's sun in Hell was embered,
Their scuffling past, their fast and noiseless pace.
These were the very riffraff of the place.
Wiser than they the chittering folk they led.

Yet Rhadamanthus still inclined his head
To hear that laugh of folly now struck dumb.
Charon abode one hail no more to come
Across his gloomy lake. He had not wist—!
The evening of the Ransom none were missed
Along the marly banks of Phlegethon
Like those poor mummers who had nothing done
To merit crowns of fire or sulphur pits,
Who still had bided living by their wits,
Lugubrious, jocund, all for Hell's disport.

Next mine eyes lifted to the heavenly court.
Meseemed I saw them capping, rank on rank:
Monkey and particoloured mountebank
Before the erect and silver-winged synod.
Fantasticality germane to God
In some strange fashion!
It seemed that there was borne
Down to me sound as from a golden horn
Winding among the stars. A little after
I marked the likeness of its strain to laughter.
Afar it fell, and rose again, and fell . . .
Fools that dispraise Him shall lead apes in Hell!

OTHER EYES

"Sky congealed, that you can feel; cold sky,
Shattered, smoking, glittering to the eye,
Weltering, heavy, fallen, sorrowful, profound;
Ponderous in rainy ruin groveling on the ground;
Rolling thunder, hurling cloud, in its frenzy to be free!"
Of the Ocean said the Oread to me.

"Shaggy ocean, harsh ocean, hot and dense,
Fibrous, feverous, seaweed-stifled; only thence
Colors sometimes, sometimes sounds, in gleam and gloom,
Waves of light and rustling murmurs that assume
Sound and color of my old and cold and deep and emerald sea!"
Of the Forest said the Nereid to me.

"This lake above; this lake all light and not to touch;
Blue as pools, yet fleeced with foam beyond the clutch;
Shadowless of leaf or blossom; far, and yet so near, as now;
Darting serpents down through blackness, fire-fanged, rending branch and bough;
High, still, dark, with lights a myriad like some vast and jeweled tree!"
Of the Sky said the Dryad to me.

WHALE

Rain, with a silver flail;
Sun, with a golden ball;
Ocean, wherein the whale
Swims minnow-small;

I heard the whale rejoice
And cynic sharks attend;
He cried with a purple voice,
"The Lord is my Friend!"

" 'With flanged and battering tail,
With huge and dark baleen,'
He said, 'Let there be Whale
In the Cold and Green!'

"He gave me a water spout,
A side like a harbor wall;
The Lord from cloud looked out
And planned it all.

"With glittering crown atilt
He leaned on a glittering rail;
He said, 'Where Sky is spilt,
Let there be Whale.'

"Tier upon tier of wings
  Blushed and blanched and bowed;
Phalanxed fiery things
  Cried in the cloud;

"Million-eyed was the mirk
  At the plan not understood;
But the Lord looked on his work
  And saw it was good.

"He gave me marvelous girth
  For the curve of back and breast,
And a tiny eye of mirth
  To hide His jest.

"He made me a floating hill,
  A plunging deep-sea mine.
This was the Lord's will;
  The Lord is Divine.

"I magnify his name
  In earthquake and eclipse,
In weltering molten flame
  And wrecks of ships,

"In waves that lick the moon;
  I, the plow of the sea!
I am the Lord's boon,
  The Lord made me!"

The sharks barked from beneath,
  As the great whale rollicked and roared,
"Yes, and our grinning teeth,
  Was it not the Lord?"

Then question pattered like hail
From fishes large and small.
"The Lord is mighty," said Whale,
"The Lord made all!

"His is a mammoth jest
Life may never betray;
He has laid it up in His breast
Till Judgment Day;

"But high when combers foam
And tower their last of all,
My power shall haul you home
Through Heaven wall.

"A trumpet then in the gates,
To the ramps a thundering drum,
I shall lead you where He waits
For His Whale to come.

"Where His cloudy seat is placed
On high in an empty dome,
I shall trail the Ocean abased
In chains of foam,

"Unwieldy, squattering dread;
Where the blazing cohorts stand
At last I shall lift my head
As it feels His hand.

"Then wings with a million eyes
Before mine eyes shall quail:
'Look you, all Paradise,
I was His Whale!' "

I heard the Whale rejoice,
As he splayed the waves to a fan;
"And the Lord shall say with His Voice,
'Leviathan!'

"The Lord shall say with His Tongue,
'Now let all Heaven give hail
To my Jest when I was young,
To my very Whale.' "

Then the Whale careened in the Sea,
He floundered with flailing tail;
Flourished and rollicked he,
"Aha! Mine Empery!
For the Lord said, 'Let Whale Be!'
And there Was Whale!"

VIII

SONNETS

"For, after all, I suppose one does write sonnets!"

—*A Contemporary.*

SONNETS TO MY FATHER

I.

You rhymed like Lear for us when we were small.
Our walks with you were full of things mysterious
Made magic by your twinkle and half-drawl,
Because we could not tell if you were serious.
You rose to some occasions quite imperious,
"Explained" the jokes to us in comic papers,
And read us Russian fairy-tales, the shapers
Of visions grim, fantastic, and delirious.

You laughed at us and teased us and regarded
Our medieval lives with understanding;
And often there were monsters that you warded
Away with words unique and mirth commanding.
We'd hang across the landing till we'd fall,
Waiting to hear your step down in the hall.

II.

"Well, bears!" or "How is Little John to-night?"
"The man who made this match, my son, must be a—"
"Oh, Father, you'll not *please* turn on the light
Until we hear what happened to Gackelea!"
"Dark? Nonsense! Read? A very strange idea!"
The leather chair at last denounced this attitude,
And, coiled at various lengths, we breathed beatitude
Before some world's-end castle on Mount Moria.

There, at endearing sprawl that never cost your
True dignity the loss of one iota,
We would regard you from precarious posture,
Squirming with exclamation points, or stilly
As a hushed mouse, while thrillingly you'd quote a
Rhyme, or wake fairies in a tiger-lily.

III.

Time, the dark whale, spouts blithely from his spiracle
A jet of memory that makes glad the sun.
In you the intuition for true fun
Wrought us the breathless and quotidian miracle.
You taught us words like these with pomp satirical,
And I have but to listen and I hear
Your voice croon, "Shed no tear, oh, shed no tear!"
Swayed between the ironic and the lyrical.

Hard lines in Cæsar, equations in quadratics,
Charades, acrostics, walks that made us pant
And sit on stones because our breath was scant
And our legs short; the furbishings from attics,
Furniture, daily bread, child-grief that stings,
You took, transformed, and made amazing things.

IV.

Yet you have looked, even as all men must,
On the Medusa, and looked down her eyes.
Now I perceive it, in my time made wise
Though not with half the valor or the trust;
Your spirit blue as steel unflecked by rust,
Your mind forever snapping dragon-flies
Whimsical at their sheen, their sting of lies
But relish, where so soon all things are dust.

You held life to us like a twirling prism
Nor flinched a facet with your curious gaze.
You said, "Yes, so it sparkles, so it sways."
You hated, loved, and smiled. No syllogism
Had said the last. All ways you cast your looks
And walked the world and read a thousand books.

V.

You had the touch, the gesture, the exact
Quick divination for a thing well-said.
Sometimes I only find in what you read
To us your overtones, that drove the fact
Of greatness home with thrust, that thrid close-packed
And marvelous Browning with a tongue in cheek,
Thrilled to him on his heights, enjoyed his Greek,
And so took all the gods, with spacious tact.

Your detestation inchoate Carlyle
Turned Prussian-blue; your weakness, Stevenson.
("They" call it weakness!) In the lucky-bag
Of literature you angled, for a while
Parceled the patchwork, when the day was done
Knew every banner from every bogus rag.

VI.

You found a quartz-stone, Duty, and you found
A white lamp, Truth, and Honor, a sweet fire,
Whose ways are up the jagged crags that tire
But whose domain has azure for a ground
Where trumpets snarl no more but golden sound
Hangs rapt, like the great ending of a song.
There you have peers. There all your years belong,
Who took that road, slung with a magic lyre.

Your hands would never touch it, but in shade
Of your proud thoughts, your dreams, to children's ears
What men will never know, but the heart hears
And sees bright-meteored mount the frowning years,
All of itself, all of itself it played
That high fantastic tune your spirit made!

PEARL DIVER

I had an image of the bright, bare Day
Like a tall diver poised above the surge
Of blackest night, where its vast fluctuant verge
Lapped against heaven's ramparts, broad and gray.
Flickering with ghostly fires, beneath him lay
That gulf where light must drown that light emerge.
His nimbused radiance stooped to dare its gurge,
Plunged, and flashed deep through showers of starry spray.

Swift his transfigured contours clove the dark,
Suffusing fathom on fathom of night aswirl
With tints of rose, all tremoring into one,
Till from cloud floors he plucked a filmy pearl
And held it high for earth and heaven to mark,—
The cold globe of the winter-shrunken sun.

ON EDWARD WEBBE, ENGLISH GUNNER

His troublesome travailes

He met the Danske pirates off Tuttee;
Saw the Chrim burn "Musko"; speaks with bated breath
Of his sale to the great Turk, when peril of death
Chained him to oar their galleys on the sea
Until, as gunner, in Persia they set him free
To fight their foes. Of Prester John he saith
Astounding things. But Queen Elizabeth
He worships, and his dear Lord on Calvary.

Quaint is the phrase, ingenuous the wit
Of this great childish seaman in Palestine,
Mocked home through Italy after his release
With threats of the Armada; and all of it
Warms me like firelight jeweling old wine
In some ghost inn hung with the golden fleece!

MICHELANGELO IN THE FISH-MARKET

Here's colour for my monsters! Verily,
This is no Arno-spawn,—far greater game!
These shimmering, gleaming, flashing forms first came
To sunlight in the great Ægean Sea.
Ye sacred symbols! They have whispered me
Your Greek style bears the initials of His name
And titles, where lies hidden in the same
The Sibyl of Erythra's prophecy!

Howbeit, Messer Domenico, you
Shall gape to see my drawing when I'm through.
What dawn-pulsed gills, what splendor on each scale!
This mullet's bottle-green, with silver under,—
That weird, dark-flecked murena,—well, no wonder
I shall net Popes when soon I spread my sail!

THE OREGON TRAIL

The grizzled trapper of the log stockade,
Gaudy in buckskin sewn with beads and bells,
Hawk-eyed, his ears still echoing the yells
Of fierce Dakotas riding on their raid;
The coulee's murmur in the willows' shade;
The glaring prairie; Indian village smells;
Dust of the bison herd; the miracles
Of hardihood whereby the West was made;

Half fabulous from page on page they rise,
Traced by an ailing hand, with failing eyes,
Till, dark upon a clear and golden sky,
The heroic Ogallalah lifts his lance
And hurls, where war plumes in the distance dance,
His doomed and unintelligible cry.

THE SILVER BALLOON

The soubrette's song still echoing in his ears,
The footlight dazzle still upon his eyes,
He craned to look, and saw the blinded skies
Yield what the searchlights sought. Great shafts like shears
Raked west and east. "How calm that beggar steers!"
He thought, appraising with but small surprise
The floating doom. Two aeroplanes like flies
Crawled up the stars . . . it seemed for years and years.

The searchlights dimmed. The four-point-sevens spoke.
The long bulk lurched a little, loosed a speck,—
And from the crowd fierce pandemonium broke.
He saw no bomb, no flare, no toppling wreck,
But—in his mind—Kensington Garden noons,
And an old woman selling toy balloons.

THE WORLD'S DESIRE

Pain of familiar beauty fills the heart
Seeing rich dreams through some rare sunset drift,
Or when on lawns the summer shadows shift
In soft designs beyond Man's clumsy art
To emulate. Quick tears may almost start
When the anointed stars to heaven uplift
Their voiceless adoration, and a rift
Seems shining in the night where pale clouds part.

In hours like these what vast benevolence
Breathes through the world! O God beyond illusion,
Then we believe you know our dark confusion,
With fervent answers soothing every sense;
And yet we feel—what pain—in the intense
Desire for you to end your long seclusion!

ANOMALY

Men who are fain to change, look wizenedly
Into the flowing mirror of your thought
And see on what strange reefs your joys are caught,
And contemplate your vexed variety:
Grief that was hooded for eternity
Casting the stole for spangled domino,
Awe on its pinnacle jigging heel and toe,
Love laughing into hate and mockery.

What shoots the warp to patterns that reblend
And spread and fade,—and working out what end?
In time of pain why be as voluble
As one who tells an endless useless sum,
But simple clay, pallid and deaf and dumb,
Through the one moment forging Heaven or Hell?

JUDGEMENT

Down the deep steps of stone, through iron doors,
I entered that red room and saw the rack,
And round the walls I saw them sit in black,
The immutable and urgent councilors.
My heart was clotted with an old remorse,
Despair a vulture fast upon my back.
I saw my body like an empty sack
Tossed disarticulate on grated floors.

But even a wilder wonder at this crime,
Tried in the dungeon of my own grim life,
Woke, as your memory awoke with tune
That crazed the very walls. I stared through Time
Like to a man who stands with smoking knife
Above his dead, and sees the rising moon.

UNFORGOTTEN

Wakening in the night, the pain that slumber
Strikes with her mace of silence dead and dumb
Loomed over me and, formless, said, "I come!
Bringing illusions lost beyond all number.
Rigid you lie, yet for a little cumber
This flaming world, where some die proudly, some
Glitter like granite, or dream millennium."
It left me toiled in mountainous clouds of umber.

I lay sustaining all the old emotion,
Numbed as beneath the blows of iron cars.
Then slowly, slowly, some supreme devotion
Crept down, and drew me out of ageless wars,
Like a dear voice heard over darkened ocean
When all dim heaven is trembling into stars.

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